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ABSTRACT

An evaluation of the VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) Literacy Corps was conducted to provide a description of the Literacy Corps, numbers of persons served, strategies used, volunteer activities, and project results; to determine the degree to which the program is meeting its goals; and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the VISTA Literacy Corps. Data were gathered from 60 VISTA Literacy Corps project directors and 313 active VISTA volunteers through a mailed survey. Telephone interviews were conducted with 153 former volunteers, and 18 site visits were made. Some of the findings of the survey were the following: (1) the median number of clients served by a program was 220; (2) the major activities of VISTA volunteers were client recruitment, outreach, recruiting of tutors and other volunteers, and recordkeeping; (3) volunteers received an average of 42 hours of training; and (4) volunteers were most effective in increasing links with other organizations. The study concluded that the VISTA Literacy Corps is meeting its mandate to work with disadvantaged populations in poverty areas and that the literacy projects will have a hard time serving their clientele once VISTA volunteers complete their service. The study recommended that literacy should remain a focus of the VISTA program, that the structure be improved, and that greater communication among VISTA Literacy Corps projects should be encouraged. (8 references) (KC)

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VISTA

An Evaluation Report on the VISTA Literacy Corps

August, 1991

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An Evaluation Report on the VISTA Literacy Corps

August 1991

An Evaluation Report on the VISTA Literacy Corps

Submitted Under Contract Number: 90-043-1009

ACTION
Office of Policy, Research and Evaluation
Program Analysis and Evaluation Division
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August 1991

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

In 1986, Congress set up a new literacy component within VISTA to address the problems of illiteracy. Congress authorized the new VISTA Literacy Corps within VISTA under the Domestic Volunteer Service Act Amendments of 1986 (PL 99-551). ACTION, the federal domestic volunteer agency, administers the VISTA program.

The Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, amended December 31, 1987, requires ACTION to evaluate each of its programs every three years. The legislation states,

> The Director shall measure and evaluate the impact of all programs authorized by the Act, their effectiveness in achieving stated goals in general, and in relation to their cost, their impact on related programs, and their structure and mechanisms for delivery of services [PL 101-204 Sec. 416(a)].

Public Law 101-204, December 7, 1989, the Domestic Volunteer Service Act Amendments of 1989, Sec. 402, Evaluation, provided specific authority to include the VISTA Literacy Corps under this requirement. Since the VISTA Literacy Corps has been in operation for more than three years, we are now evaluating it in conformance with the Act, Section 416(a).

This evaluation had three specific goals.

(1) to provide a description of the VISTA Literacy Corps. This includes numbers of persons served, local strategies used for eradicating illiteracy, volunteer activities, and project results.

(2) to determine the degree to which the VISTA Literacy Corps is meeting its goals.

(3) to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the VISTA Literacy Corps.

BACKGROUND

The legislation defines the VISTA Literacy Corps as all VISTA Volunteers working on literacy projects and programs. VISTA has two funding sources for the VISTA Literacy Corps: the regular VISTA appropriation, as authorized by Title I, Part A of the Act, and one specifically for literacy projects, Title V, Sec.501(a)(2). The evaluation focused on the VISTA Literacy Corps projects funded by the latter. VISTA manages these projects separately and all efforts in these projects are exclusively literacy. When this report refers to VISTA Literacy Corps projects, the reference is to this group of projects.

By the end of 1989, ACTION had spent more than $8 million in support of VISTA Literacy Corps projects. At the end of August 1990, the time this research was beginning, ACTION was funding 360 VISTA Volunteers at 64 VISTA Literacy Corps project sites. The Fiscal Year 1991 appropriation was $4,620,900.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

This evaluation provides information on the type and level of contributions VISTA Volunteers are making in the national effort to combat illiteracy. In the evaluation, 60 VISTA Literacy Corps Project Directors, 313 active VISTA Volunteers and 153 former VISTA Volunteers completed surveys. Researchers administered the surveys by mail and telephone. Additionally, researchers visited 18 VISTA Literacy Corps projects.

Nature of VISTA Literacy Corps Projects. The Project Director survey revealed that the sponsoring organizations of the VISTA Literacy Corps projects have a median age of 12 years. Fifty-nine percent of the sponsors, however, have been in operation for five years or less. Project Directors reported that 56 percent of the VISTA Literacy Corps projects had from one to three Volunteers. Projects have a median of two paid staff members and two part-time staff assistants.

Most literacy projects rely strictly on the use of available information (usually quite limited) or informal techniques for conducting needs assessments and evaluations. There is an almost complete absence of outcome data. Improving needs assessment and evaluation procedures could result in a better allocation of resources to literacy efforts.

Characteristics of Project Clients. The Project Director survey documented that the median number of literacy clients served by VISTA Literacy Corps projects was 220, with a range from 10 to 46,590 clients. Project Directors reported that most clients (52 percent) served by VISTA Literacy Corps projects are members of minority groups. Forty-seven percent do not have jobs. Seventy percent have family incomes at or below the poverty level. Sixty-six percent read at or below a fourth-grade reading level. Project Directors reported that an average of 81 percent of their clients receive regular literacy instruction. Nineteen percent receive ESL instruction.

Characteristics of VISTA Volunteers. The VISTA Volunteer survey revealed that VISTA Volunteers assigned to VISTA Literacy Corps projects are mostly females (84 percent) with an average age of 41 years. Most Volunteers (58 percent) are single and they average 16 months of service. Sixty-three percent of the VISTA Volunteers are White (non-Hispanic). The rest are: 22 percent Black (non-Hispanic), 9 percent Hispanic, 2 percent Asian, and 2 percent Native American. The survey showed that 42 percent of VISTA Volunteers reported being college graduates or had completed some graduate work. The average age for college graduates was 36 years (53 percent), where the mean age for VISTA Volunteers reporting some graduate work was 50 years (47 percent).

Activities of VISTA Volunteers. The Volunteer survey revealed that the major activities of VISTA Volunteers are client recruitment, outreach, recruiting of tutors and other community volunteers, and record keeping. Project Directors reported that VISTA

Volunteers were most effective in community outreach activities, tutor and client recruitment, and tutor training. Forty-five percent of the VISTA Volunteers felt that their most effective activity was community awareness and outreach. The second most effective activity cited by Volunteers was client recruitment (36 percent).

The Volunteer survey showed that the most important effect of the VISTA Literacy Corps projects on clients, as reported by the Volunteers (97 percent), was the clients' increased self-esteem. Other reported effects on clients included: increased personal enjoyment of reading (86 percent), improved life skills (83 percent), greater family satisfaction (81 percent), and improved ability to work (80 percent).

Training of Volunteers. VISTA Volunteers reported receiving an average of 42 hours of training from their sponsoring organization. The most useful training the Volunteers reported receiving was in communication skills/public relations and tutor training. VISTA Volunteers rated training in fund-raising as least useful of all the areas rated This is consonant with the opinions of former Volunteers. When we asked them about the need for additional training, they most often mentioned training in fund-raising.

VISTA Volunteers receive limited training in newly emerging topics in literacy. They need more training from sponsoring organizations in topics such as English as a Second Language (ESL), workplace literacy, family literacy, and activities for the learning disabled.

Effects of VISTA Literacy Corps Projects. Project Directors (83 percent) reported that the most important impact of VISTA Volunteers is that they increased cooperation or partnerships with other organizations. Other impacts were: more regular literacy clients served, more literacy tutors, larger projects to serve different clients, and increased effectiveness of literacy tutors.

The former VISTA Volunteer survey documented the following most frequently reported results of service. Most (97 percent) of the former Volunteers said that they increased their knowledge of literacy issues. Eighty-eight percent reported an increase in personal self-confidence. Twenty-eight percent of the former VISTA Volunteers reported continuing to work in the field of adult literacy after leaving VISTA. Seventeen percent were working with low-income persons in human services and 7 percent in education.

Sustainability of VISTA Projects. We asked Project Directors about the expected level of services once VISTA Volunteers completed their Volunteer service. Nineteen percent of the Directors believed there would be an expansion of services. Twenty percent thought there would be little change in client services. One-third (32 percent), however, believed their project would lose some services and 28 percent felt they risked losing many services. Only 2 percent of the Directors thought that their project would stop as a result of the loss of VISTA Volunteers.

MAJOR CONCLUSIONS

- The VISTA Literacy Corps is meeting its mandate to work with disadvantaged populations in areas of poverty.
- Medium-sized VISTA Literacy Corps projects in multi-county settings are more effective than statewide or local projects in their ability to deliver quality services to their clients.
- Most recruitment of VISTA Volunteers continues to be from the local community.
- Training and supervision of VISTA Volunteers need to be flexible to meet the demands of a diverse Volunteer population.
- Training provided to VISTA Volunteers focuses too little on specific skill needs.
- Few VISTA Literacy Corps projects devote resources for conducting formal community needs assessment or project evaluations.
- Many VISTA Literacy Corps projects will have difficulty in becoming fully self-sustaining without the loss of some services when VISTA Volunteers are no longer available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Program Recommendations

- ACTION should keep literacy as a programmatic focus within the VISTA program.
- ACTION planning should concentrate on the development of moderate-sized projects in multi-county settings.
- The administrative structure of statewide VISTA Literacy Corps projects could be improved.
- VISTA should continue to advise projects of the availability of ACTION-referred VISTA Volunteers.
- The travel allowance paid to VISTA Volunteers should be increased from $ .17 per mile to $ .25 per mile.

Technical Assistance Recommendations

- ACTION should enhance the ability of VISTA Literacy Corps sponsoring organizations to develop self-sustaining projects.
- ACTION should promote greater communication among VISTA Literacy Corps projects for sharing information on literacy issues.
- ACTION should develop a set of needs assessment guidelines for potential project sponsors to improve the match between project design and community needs.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

We begin our report on the VISTA Literacy Corps with brief overviews of

- the program's background.
- our evaluation goals.
- the research methods.

VISTA LITERACY CORPS BACKGROUND

The Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program has provided full-time Volunteers to thousands of low-income communities across the nation. The Volunteers serve one year to face problems of poverty and to help needy Americans achieve a measure of self-reliance. By the time the VISTA program celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1989, nearly 100,000 Americans had served as VISTA Volunteers.

In 1986, Congress set up a new literacy component within VISTA to address the problems of illiteracy. The U.S. Department of Education has estimated that 27 million Americans can barely read and write. This problem afflicts one in five adult Americans. The Department has classified these adults as "functionally incompetent" (Adult Performance Level Study 1977:41). Congress authorized the new VISTA Literacy Corps within VISTA under the Domestic Volunteer Service Act Amendments of 1986 (PL 99-551). ACTION, the federal domestic volunteer agency, administers the VISTA program.

This legislation set aside funding specifically targeted to the eradication of illiteracy. Congress envisioned that VISTA Volunteers could help address the problems of illiteracy by aiding communities to better serve disadvantaged populations. The VISTA Literacy Corps seeks to:

- encourage partnerships and promote volunteerism.
- enhance statewide and local literacy activities.
- mobilize resources and increase the capacity of the low-income community to address its literacy needs.
- develop a comprehensive approach for combating illiteracy.

VISTA Volunteers would help persons "educationally at risk" in unserved or underserved low-income areas. These Volunteers would have several priorities.

- Helping illiterate individuals in extreme need who live in areas of illiteracy and poverty.
- Serving individuals reading at the zero to fourth-grade level.
- Providing literacy services to high-risk populations.
- Operating in areas with the highest concentrations of individuals and families living at or below the poverty level.
- Providing literacy services to parents of disadvantaged children between the ages of two and eight.
- Encouraging the creation of new literacy efforts and coordination of intrastate literacy efforts, and providing technical help to local literacy efforts.
- Heightening public awareness of how individuals, organizations, and communities can give to literacy efforts and further generate local support.
- Lowering barriers to employment by improving the basic reading skills of the unemployed or marginally employed.

By the end of 1989, ACTION had spent more than $8 million in support of these goals. At the end of August 1990, the time this research was beginning, ACTION was funding 360 VISTA Volunteers at 64 VISTA Literacy Corps project sites. The FY 1991 appropriation for VISTA Literacy Projects was $4,620,900.

EVALUATION GOALS

The Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973, amended December 31, 1987, requires ACTION to evaluate each of its programs every three years. The legislation states,

> The Director shall measure and evaluate the impact of all programs authorized by the Act, their effectiveness in achieving stated goals in general, and in relation to their cost, their impact on related programs, and their structure and mechanisms for delivery of services [PL 101-204 Sec. 416(a)].

Public Law 101-204, December 7, 1989, the Domestic Volunteer Service Act Amendments of 1989, Sec. 402, Evaluation, provided specific authority to include the VISTA Literacy Corps under this requirement. Since the VISTA Literacy Corps has been in operation for more than three years, we are now evaluating it in conformance with the Act, Section 416(a).

The legislation defines the VISTA Literacy Corps as all VISTA Volunteers working on literacy projects and programs. VISTA has two funding sources for the VISTA Literacy Corps: the regular VISTA appropriation, as authorized by Title I, Part A of the Act, and one specifically for literacy projects, Title V, Sec.501(a)(2). The evaluation focused on the VISTA Literacy Corps projects funded by the latter. VISTA manages these projects separately and all efforts in these projects are exclusively literacy. When this report refers to VISTA Literacy Corps projects, the reference is to this group of projects.

This report presents the findings of this evaluation of the VISTA Literacy Corps. We sought to examine how well the projects were working. We also looked at the quantity and quality of services delivered to the clients of the literacy projects. ACTION's Office of Policy Research and Evaluation oversaw the evaluation. Development Associates, Inc. of Arlington, Virginia conducted the evaluation under a contract with ACTION.

This evaluation had three specific goals.

(1) to provide a description of the VISTA Literacy Corps. This includes numbers of persons served, local strategies used for eradicating illiteracy, volunteer activities, and project results.

(2) to determine the degree to which the VISTA Literacy Corps is meeting its goals.

(3) to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the VISTA Literacy Corps.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

We guided the development of our evaluation methods with a set of broad research questions. Working with ACTION's research and program offices, we framed eight basic questions on the nature and effects of the VISTA Literacy Corps. To answer these questions, we used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. We developed standardized questionnaires for conducting a mail survey of VISTA Volunteers and VISTA Project Directors and a telephone survey of former VISTA Volunteers. In addition, we visited VISTA Literacy Corps projects to interview VISTA Volunteers and their Project Directors to gain further insights.

Research Questions

Eight research questions guided the evaluation.

1. What is the nature of the VISTA Literacy Corps projects in which Volunteers are serving?

2. What are the characteristics of clients served by VISTA Literacy Corps Projects?

3. What are the characteristics of VISTA Volunteers?

4. What are the major activities of VISTA Volunteers?

5. What types of training do VISTA Volunteers receive, and is the training adequate?

6. What effects do the VISTA Literacy Corps projects have on clients, sponsoring organizations, and the broader community?

7. What are the effects of the VISTA experience on the VISTA Volunteers?

8. To what extent are the initiatives of VISTA Volunteers sustained after the VISTA Literacy project ends?

Survey Data Collection

We conducted the three surveys between December 1990 and mid-February 1991. We sent questionnaires to all 63 current VISTA Literacy Corps Project Directors and 335 active VISTA Volunteers in these projects.[1] Sixty Directors completed and returned their questionnaires, a 95 percent response rate. We received questionnaire responses from 313 active VISTA Volunteers, a 94 percent response rate. The third survey involved conducting telephone interviews with 155 former VISTA Volunteers.

On-Site Project Data Collection

We conducted three-day site visits to VISTA Literacy Corps projects. This yielded information in the form of reports, local statistics, and basic field notes. From a list of 75 Literacy Corps projects (August, 1990) we selected a stratified random sample of 18 projects. Sixty-three projects were still active after the site visits ended in December, 1990. Thus, the 18 projects visited represented 29 percent of the total active projects. We used three variables to stratify site selection: the number of VISTA Volunteers, urban (100,000 or more) or rural (less than 100,000), and public or private sponsor.

In total, there were 16 possible sampling strata. We also selected projects to assure a geographic distribution of sites across nine ACTION Regions and a cross-section of VISTA Literacy Corps projects based upon years in operation. Table 1.1 presents the list of 18 sites visited, ordered by their ACTION Region from east to west. This table identifies the number of active VISTA Volunteers and the type of project (statewide, multi-county, or local). We visited 10 private sponsors and eight public sponsors of VISTA Literacy Corps projects.

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[1] These figures represent the actual number of project sites and active VISTA Literacy Corps Volunteers on December 1, 1990 when the survey questionnaires were mailed.

TABLE 1.1
CHARACTERISTICS OF SITES VISITED

Project	Number of Active Volunteers	Project Type		
		State-wide	Multi-County	Local
Rhode Island Dept. of Education & Secondary Education, Providence, RI	3		X	
Dept. of Human Development Santurce, PR	14		X	
BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center Geneseo, NY	8		X	
Interfaith Consortium Cumberland, MD	2		X	
Ready to Read Columbus, OH	3			X
East-End Community Learning Center Cincinnati, OH	3			X
Morehead State University Morehead, KY	10		X	
Mid-State Literacy Council State College, PA	3		X	
Columbus County Library Whiteville, NC	5			X
Wallace State College Selma, AL	1			X
Eastern Iowa Community College Davenport, IA	7		X	
Tulsa City/County Library Tulsa, OK	2			X
Travis County Adult Literacy Council Austin, TX	2			X
Arkansas County Literacy Council Stuttgart, AR	3			X
Utah Literacy/ESL Coalition Salt Lake City, UT	8	X		
Literacy Volunteers of Maricopa County Phoenix, AZ	8		X	
California Literacy, Inc. San Gabriel, CA	19	X		
Seattle Central Community College Seattle, WA	7	X		

Five researchers visited 18 projects during October and November of 1990, with individual researchers each visiting three to four sites. Researchers used basic ethnographic techniques during these site visits. They conducted open-ended and unstructured interviews with

Project Directors and VISTA Volunteers as well as community literacy volunteers and clients. The emphasis was on listening to participants describe their project and observing their activities. Researchers treated each project site as a unique entity where they could gain first-hand knowledge of how well these literacy projects were performing in their local communities.

The 18 project sites had been in operation from one to four years. There were two first-year projects and four second-year projects. Nine sites were in their third year and three in their fourth. At the 18 sites, VISTA had approved 141 VISTA Volunteers for placement. When we conducted the site visits, we found 108 active VISTA Volunteers assigned at the sites.

Data Analysis

Our overall research goal was to produce a profile of the dominant themes or patterns that characterized the VISTA Literacy Corps Program. We coded and entered survey data into three data files: current VISTA Volunteers, Project Directors, and former VISTA Volunteers. We first conducted descriptive statistics for the overall population features of each group surveyed. Second, we conducted comparative analyses based on the type of project and Volunteer characteristics. Third, we conducted relational analyses for determining what factors might predict Volunteer and project effectiveness.

On-site project data provided additional insights on the findings of the quantitative surveys. We also reviewed the site reports for descriptive content and identification of unique features of individual projects.

CHAPTER TWO
VISTA LITERACY CORPS CHARACTERISTICS

Understanding of the VISTA Literacy Corps can begin with describing the sponsoring organizations who apply for VISTA support. We also need to review the strategies projects use to combat literacy. As a third part of this picture, we can sort the projects by size. Thus, we present this chapter organized into three sections:

- Sponsor attributes.
- Literacy strategies.
- Project types.

SPONSOR ATTRIBUTES

VISTA sponsoring organizations may be public agencies or private, non-profit organizations committed to solving problems directly related to conditions of poverty. Potential sponsoring organizations apply to ACTION to develop a VISTA project. Upon approval, the sponsors develop and manage the projects in which VISTA Volunteers serve.

Many sponsoring organizations for VISTA projects are relatively new, according to the Project Directors surveyed by mail. Fifty-nine percent of the sponsoring organizations have been in operation for five years or less. Twenty-nine percent have been in operation for sixteen years or more. One sponsor has been in existence for 75 years. The median age was 4.5 years.

Table 2.1 shows that VISTA Literacy Corps projects represent a wide range of organizations involved in literacy. Thirty-nine percent of the sponsoring organizations were literacy organizations (either local affiliates of national literacy organizations, local literacy councils or statewide literacy coalitions). Another 29 percent were educational institutions (colleges or university, or a local school system).

Of the 60 projects described in questionnaires, 58 percent reported that literacy was their primary focus. The major activities of the other projects were: adult education (12 percent), community services (8 percent), and vocational and public education (4 percent each).

TABLE 2.1
Type of Sponsoring Organization

Sponsor Type	Percent of Total*
Local affiliate of a national literacy organization	17%
College or university	17%
Community-based organization or community action agency	15%
Local school system	12%
Local literacy council (private)	10%
Statewide literacy coalition	10%
State government	7%
City or county government	3%
Church or church related organization	3%
Unspecified private nonprofit organization	5%

* Total percent does not add to 100 due to rounding.

More than half of the sponsoring organizations have worked in literacy activities six years or less. One sponsoring organization has worked in literacy training for 35 years. Another five have worked in literacy for at least 25 years (see Table 2.2). The projects are small, with a median of two full-time and two part-time staff. The number of community volunteers varies widely among sponsoring organizations, with the median being 100 volunteers or tutors.

TABLE 2.2
Characteristics of VISTA Literacy Corps Projects

Characteristic	Median of Projects Reporting	Range
Years organization has provided literacy services	6 years	0 - 35
Number of full-time paid staff	2 staff	0 - 40
Number of part-time staff	2 staff	0 - 664
Number of community (non-VISTA) volunteers in literacy services	100 volunteers	1 - 10,000

The sources of funding for these literacy organizations were diverse. Table 2.3 presents the percentage of projects receiving funds by source and the mean and range of support by source. The means are high since two statewide projects skew the amounts.

TABLE 2.3
FUNDING SOURCES FOR VISTA LITERACY CORPS PROJECTS (N=55)

Funding Source	Percent of Projects With Funds From Source	Mean $	Range $
Federal government (excluding VISTA)	45%	41,668	0-1,066,978
State government	45%	39,816	0-525,000
Local government	29%	6,431	0-125,000
Local private sources (e.g., United Way)	29%	5,002	0-109,000
Local businesses	42%	8,470	0-275,000
Private contributions	58%	6,435	0-54,000
Other private sources (e.g., foundation grants)	47%	16,861	0-263,000
Project-generated sources *	22%	5,200	0-130,000
Total Annual Cash Budget		**136,891****	**0-1,446,000**

* These include local contracts, selling materials, workshop fees, etc.

** The mean source amounts do not add to the mean total cash budget because some sites provided conflicting information.

Most sponsoring organizations coordinate their literacy activities with other organizations in their community (See Table 2.4). VISTA Literacy Corps Projects receive referrals from, interact with, and make referrals to other organizations. Literacy personnel also provide or receive technical help from other organizations.

TABLE 2.4
Coordination with Other Community Organizations

Type of Coordination	Percent of Projects
Receive referrals of clients from other organizations (for example, community agencies, employers, churches)	92%
Provide to or receive technical assistance from other organizations	90%
Make referrals of clients to other literacy organizations	85%
Have joint training of staff or tutors with other organizations	82%
Provide to or receive tutors from other organizations	80%
Meet regularly with other organizations to discuss client needs and plan programs	80%
Have other organizations take over existing project	25%
Take over or assume the programs or activities of other organizations	23%

LITERACY STRATEGIES

A Nation at Risk, published in 1983 by the U.S. Department of Education, focused attention on literacy throughout the country. Information was lacking on literacy--or, rather, illiteracy. How many people could read? How well could they read? What was their level of comprehension? None of these questions had well-documented answers even for a particular definition of literacy. Answers to these questions are still not readily available. As a step to answering them at the local level, VISTA Literacy Corps projects begin with a needs assessment as part of their application. Projects, in response to the needs, usually apply an approach from one of two large literacy organizations -- Literacy Volunteers of America or Laubach Literacy International.

Needs Assessment

VISTA requires each project to document the prevalence of illiteracy in the area served by the project as part of its application for VISTA support. Organizations typically conduct two types of assessment to determine the level of literacy in a community or region. The most frequent is "formal literacy" which simply considers the amount of formal education (that is, years of schooling) a person has received. The other, much more difficult to measure,

is "functional literacy," which tries to measure how accomplished a person is in their educational skills.

Literacy organizations provide services in different areas. These commonly are "adult basic literacy," "adult basic education," "general educational development testing" (GED), and more recently, "English as a Second Language" (ESL). The VISTA literacy projects we visited worked primarily with adult basic literacy and ESL training for recent immigrants. Local school systems or community colleges typically provided Adult Basic Education and preparation for taking GED.

Researchers during the site visits found that few VISTA Literacy Corps projects conducted formal needs assessment of literacy in their own service area. Research conducted 10 to 15 years ago often becomes the basis of need. Only one of the 18 projects we visited had a thorough literacy needs assessment. It was done by the State's Department of Education in June, 1990.

All the other 17 projects relied on research conducted in the mid-1970s. A common reference, usually attributed to the U.S. Department of Education, is the Adult Performance Level Study. This study documented that one in five American adults could barely read (1977:41). The Department estimated that 27 million Americans 17 years and older were functionally illiterate. Another 45 million in this age range were marginally literate. Using 1980 census data (U.S. population = 225 million), this means that 12 percent of the population is functionally illiterate and 20 percent is marginally literate. The projects we visited commonly used these percentages to generate the estimates for their needs assessments.

Literacy Programs

Literacy programs throughout the United States commonly use approaches developed by two literacy approaches: the Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) or Laubach Literacy International (LLI). Both have acclaimed techniques for teaching literacy and have different strengths and weaknesses depending on the clients. The LVA method uses a modular learning format that steps students from one level of accomplishment to the next. The Laubach method grounds itself more in the use and application of phonics and emphasizes the content of the text.

VISTA Volunteers usually become familiar with the type of approach chosen by the sponsor. Of the 18 projects visited we found the following approaches:

- eight using LLI.
- four using LVA.
- four with both LVA and LLI.
- two using their own approaches.

At sites using two or more methods, the projects encourage tutors to use a method suited to a particular student.

Two sites have developed their own literacy approaches. The Puerto Rico project conducts its VISTA Literacy Corps projects in Spanish, the predominant language of the island, using adapted instructional materials from the primary schools. Columbus, Ohio, has devised a VISTA Literacy Corps project for adults based on the use of local newspaper sources.

English as a Second Language is a rapidly growing literacy focus. ESL projects primarily serve Hispanics and Asians. In 1990 the demand for ESL projects serving Eastern European populations increased dramatically. Half of the sites visited promoted ESL literacy for recent immigrants. These sites were California, Iowa, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Washington and Puerto Rico.

There are three initiatives in literacy. Family literacy uses a systems approach, treating it as an issue involving the client's whole family. Workplace literacy emphasizes improving reading skills of workers at the workplace. VISTA Literacy Corps projects for the learning disabled target those no longer eligible for public schooling. Researchers found VISTA Volunteers working in all of these areas.

PROJECT TYPES

Our research found that the VISTA Literacy Corps consists of three types of projects: statewide, multi-county, and local. Statewide projects centralize administration of several sites located throughout the State. Multi-county projects have a service area of two or more counties. Local projects limit their service area to one community or county.

Statewide Projects

Of 63 active VISTA Literacy Corps Projects, VISTA considers six to be statewide projects. They are in California, Idaho, Indiana, Oregon, Utah, and Washington. We visited three of these (California, Utah, and Washington). The number of VISTA Volunteers ranged from 19 in California to nine in Utah. Statewide projects, by their nature, are widespread geographically with supervisors responsible for managing Volunteers at distant locations.

In California, the sites ranged from Los Angeles in the south to Tulelake on the northern border of the State. In this State, the researcher visited six of the 15 sites, traveling 1,500 miles during a one-week period. This geographic spread means that VISTA Volunteers had limited contact with the VISTA Volunteer supervisor.

In Utah and Washington, offices in Salt Lake City and Seattle had oversight responsibility for the projects. VISTA Volunteers served at several separate sites in each State. Most sites were closer to the home office than was the case in the California VISTA Literacy Corps project.

Private non-profit organizations sponsored the California and Utah VISTA Literacy Corps Projects; a public entity was the sponsor of the Washington project. California Literacy, Inc. (CAL-LIT), the West coast center for Laubach Literacy International, operates the California project. The project had 19 VISTA Volunteers.

In Utah, the Utah Literacy/ESL Coalition coordinates the VISTA project. The Coalition develops strategies for literacy activities throughout Utah and has nine active VISTA Volunteers.

In Washington the Seattle Central Community College system runs the VISTA Literacy Corps project. This public entity coordinates the efforts of all Adult Basic Literacy Educators (ABLE) in Washington. It uses the services of VISTA Volunteers at several public and private project sites. At the time of the site visit, ABLE had placed seven Volunteers throughout Washington. They expected to place twelve more by the end of the year.

Multi-County Projects

We made site visits to eight multi-county projects, four urban and four rural. Each of these projects worked to develop and promote literacy efforts in several counties.

Private nonprofit corporations operated three projects; public organizations operated five. Some were single projects with VISTA Volunteers working in multiple county situations. We found this type of project in four sites: Cumberland, Maryland; Phoenix, Arizona; Providence, Rhode Island; and State College, Pennsylvania.

Other projects were an administrative center managing VISTA Volunteers located at different project sites. We found this type in four locations: Geneseo, New York; Santurce, Puerto Rico; Morehead, Kentucky; and Davenport, Iowa.

We found multi-county projects to be the most efficient type of arrangement for using the services of VISTA Volunteers. They can support and place more Volunteers than a local project because of their broad-based service area. They can provide better supervision of Volunteers than statewide projects and maintain a higher level of project integration. Some of the larger VISTA Literacy Corps Projects are multi-county projects. We visited two, one in Puerto Rico and one in upstate New York. Overall, the multi-county projects we visited had from two to 14 active VISTA Volunteers.

Local Projects

We visited seven local projects, four in urban settings and three in rural environments. The size of these projects ranged from three to five active VISTA Volunteers. Private, nonprofit corporations managed five of the seven projects; public organizations managed two. This group of local projects included some of the more innovative projects as well as some having difficulties.

For example, the staff at the Columbus, Ohio, project has developed a unique literacy training approach that is receiving national attention. They have developed an approach called "Ready to Read" that uses newspapers to teach basic literacy within 12 to 15 weeks. They have used this approach in the Ohio State penal system with considerable success.

Local projects can test new approaches because they are small. The Columbus project, however, like other local projects, is having funding difficulties. Small local projects are at a disadvantage because they are often new and are struggling to generate enough funding to assure their continuation. Small projects also have difficulty in recruiting staff with the needed skills in literacy.

EXAMPLE 2.1
An Outstanding VISTA Multi-County Project

One outstanding multi-county VISTA Literacy Corps project had reorganized under a new literacy council. They recently hired a new Project Director. Aware of the potential of using VISTA Volunteers to expand the literacy project quickly, ACTION approved the placement of eight Volunteers for the project in March of 1990. The Volunteers have been instrumental in helping this project to grow and expand dynamically in a period of a little more than one year.

This project is in an urban county but also serves surrounding rural counties. As a nonprofit corporation, the project can draw upon the resources of the city while providing quality services to less affluent rural constituencies. Half of the VISTA Volunteers work in outlying rural counties and the other half work in the urban areas of the literacy project. A full-time supervisor oversees the Volunteers in all phases of their assignments.

The new Project Director has been instrumental in attracting new resources to the literacy project, including the VISTA Volunteers. The literacy project is active in workplace literacy with local corporations and has a contract with the city to upgrade skills of city workers. The county court system has provided monies to improve the literacy skills of prisoners as a condition of their probation.

VISTA Volunteers provide services in all facets of this literacy project. The Project Director and supervisor have given Volunteers considerable responsibility to begin new projects and seek new sources of funding whenever possible. The project has sought to recruit VISTA Volunteers with a wide range of skills. These include two VISTA Volunteers referred to the project by ACTION and not recruited locally.

EXAMPLE 2.2
Ready To Read: An Innovative Approach to Literacy

Ready to Read began in Chillicothe Prison, Ohio in 1982. The VISTA Literacy Corps project started with one VISTA Volunteer helping a group of inmates teach each other how to read. Facing limited funds, the Volunteer seized upon the idea of using newspapers as a common medium by which to teach inmates. Newspapers were cheap, readily available, and presented information of current interest to inmates. The project stresses three basics.

1. **Teaches Life Skills** with reading and writing. Through the newspaper, students learn basic skills. They learn how to shop for groceries, make change, read a map, look for used cars, and more. Thus, those educationally at risk learn life skills as part of a total approach.

2. **Uses the sight reading approach** to build upon whatever sight-reading vocabulary adults already have. This is a practical way to use the skills of adults and expand their level of cognition.

3. **Teaches all necessary language arts** including grammar, spelling, phonics, sentence structure, and punctuation. There are 26 lessons; many students complete one lesson each week. Literacy testing conducted at Chillicothe Prison in 1986 showed that students completing workbook lessons progressed from zero reading to a fifth grade level within ten months.

The project provides one-on-one tutoring and group instruction. The project expects tutors to meet with their students at least once a week for a minimum of 90 minutes. It encourages a one year commitment by tutors and students.

This approach to literacy training is gaining considerable momentum. Ready to Read became a non-profit organization in 1989 and opened its first office in Columbus, Ohio. **Ready to Read** has now expanded from four States in 1989 to 34 States and Canada within two years.

CHAPTER THREE
VOLUNTEERS AND CLIENTS

In this chapter, we describe

- VISTA Volunteers assigned to VISTA Literacy Corps projects.
- Clients in literacy projects served by Volunteers.

VISTA VOLUNTEERS ASSIGNED TO VISTA LITERACY CORPS PROJECTS

We begin with a profile of the VISTA Volunteers assigned to VISTA Literacy Corps projects. Then, we supplement this profile with information, gained during our site visits, on the Volunteers' backgrounds.

Active and Former VISTA Volunteers in VISTA Literacy Corps Projects

Table 3.1 portrays the demographic characteristics of the active VISTA Volunteer respondents and the former Volunteer respondents. The gender of the two groups (as defined by the data collection technique) is similar. Females make up 86 percent of the VISTA Volunteers.

This table also shows that a greater percentage of active VISTA Volunteers are minority group members than are former Volunteers (37 percent compared to 28 percent). In addition, active Volunteers are slightly less likely to be college graduates than former Volunteers (42 percent compared to 46 percent). Both active and former Volunteers are likely to be residents of the community where the project is. Former Volunteers are more likely to be from the community than active Volunteers (89 percent compared to 80 percent).

Volunteers' Experiences before VISTA

In the mail survey, active VISTA Volunteers provided information about their experiences before entering the VISTA Literacy Corps. Thirty percent served as tutors or community volunteers, 33 percent had part-time jobs, 21 percent attended school, 13 percent were retired, and 17 percent worked full-time. (There was some overlap among these groups.) Thirty-three percent had some previous affiliation (as a community volunteer, employee, etc.) with the sponsoring organization of the VISTA project before becoming VISTA Volunteers.

We asked VISTA Volunteers if they had training or experience working with people with limited literacy skills before joining VISTA. Fifty-one percent reported previous training and 65 percent reported previous experience.

We also asked what motivated them to join VISTA. There were three frequent responses: enjoyment in helping people (39 percent), to improve people's lives (35 percent), and personal development or job experience (22 percent).

Fourteen percent of the VISTA Volunteers stated that they had an interest in literacy. Seven percent said that they had prior experience as a community volunteer. Only 4 percent reported becoming a VISTA Volunteer because they needed a job. They basically join VISTA out of a commitment and desire to help others. We present some examples of VISTA Volunteers backgrounds in Example 3.1.

TABLE 3.1
Demographic Characteristics of Active and Former VISTA Volunteers in VISTA Literacy Corps Projects

Characteristics	Active Volunteers: Mail Survey (N=313)	Former Volunteers: Telephone Sample (N=153)
Gender		
Male	16%	14%
Female	84%	86%
TOTAL	100%	100%
Age		
Under 30	26%	19%
30-49	44%	43%
50 and over	30%	38%
TOTAL	100%	100%
Ethnic Group		
White, non-Hispanic	63%	72%
Black, non-Hispanic	22%	19%
Hispanic	9%	6%
Asian	2%	1%
Native American	2%	1%
Other	1%	1%
	100%	
Education Level		
8th grade or less	1%	--
Some high school	5%	3%
High school graduate	15%	11%
Some college	37%	40%
College graduate	22%	26%
Graduate study	20%	20%
	100%	
Resident When Recruited for VISTA		
Same community as project	80%	89%
Other community	20%	11%
TOTAL	100%	100%

* Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

EXAMPLE 3.1
Some Typical VISTA Volunteer Backgrounds

Doris was a long-time county resident recently retired from 23 years of service to the State in various roles. These included Ward Clerk for an inpatient facility for the developmentally disabled. She left her work to set up the first group home for developmentally disabled adults, which she ran for 12 years. One month after retirement, boredom set in and she learned through the Employment Office of the VISTA opening. She applied, and the project accepted her application immediately.

Lynette is a grandmother with seven children, ages two to twenty-two, two of whom are in college. Originally from Florida, Lynette has been a migrant all her life. She worked in the fields since she was six years old. She married at 16 and "never lived in a decent house." Lynette was a 10th grade dropout. After her second marriage failed, she returned to the area to her first husband and received counseling services through a local community action agency. She then took and passed her GED. Her GED tutor recruited her for VISTA service.

Mary grew up in a migrant family and missed a lot of school as a child. She always felt she didn't belong and left school after getting pregnant at age 16. She is making an effort to resettle in a permanent community and has spent the last four years on one farm. She has four children ages five to twelve. After several tries, Mary passed her GED in 1988. She tried factory jobs but disliked them. She learned about the VISTA opening through her activity with the local literacy council.

Brian is a Long Island native who graduated from college with a degree in journalism. He worked four years as a reporter and six years as an editor of a local papers. During his journalism career, he felt that he had hurt as many people as he had helped. After 10 years, he wanted "a year of giving back, of doing only good." He thought about the Peace Corps, but the health of his elderly father forces him to stay in this country, so he applied to VISTA.

Paula has a degree in comparative psychology. Her first job after college was "training wolves at the Franklin Zoo." She then moved to Alaska with her husband. She worked for Housing and Urban Development as a counselor in Massachusetts, and did social work in Kentucky. Paula recently resettled in the East with her husband. She saw an ad in the paper for VISTA openings. She felt it would be a good way to anchor herself in the community. She also felt it would be a more positive and participatory experience in outreach to the poor than her social services position had allowed.

EXAMPLE 3.2
BERNARD: AN OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEER

Our researchers met many outstanding and dedicated VISTA Volunteers during the site visit phase of this evaluation. One, in particular, stood out as an excellent example of volunteerism serving to improve the lives of those less fortunate.

Bernard, a man in his mid-thirties, grew up in the tough Cabrini-Green housing project in Chicago. One of fourteen children, he expected to live his life out in the streets, dealing with gangs, drugs, and whatever he happened to meet. In his interview with the researcher, Bernard said that a single police officer took an interest in him. Otherwise he would have probably been destined for a life of crime. This police officer cajoled, encouraged, and helped Bernard to get off the streets and learn a trade as a printer.

After working several years in his trade and becoming quite successful at it, Bernard wanted to do more than just work a nine to five job. He saw an ad for VISTA. He learned that a year of service would allow him "to give something back to those who had helped him escape poverty." Bernard felt that he could provide an example to others. He believed that anything is possible with a little help and a lot of hard work. The most impressive quality in Bernard was that "can't" is simply not in his vocabulary.

Bernard spent a year as a VISTA Volunteer in a project working with Vietnamese, but not aimed at illiteracy. He thoroughly enjoyed this experience and saw how important reading and writing was to the assimilation process. Partly due to this, and because he felt he still had more to give, Bernard extended his service for another year. In his second tour, he chose a VISTA Literacy Corps project. At his new site, Bernard has been working with minorities as well as probationers assigned to literacy projects. Once he ends his VISTA tour, Bernard and his wife intend to stay on in this community. He plans on returning to his trade but also wants to remain active as a community volunteer in social services of some types--probably literacy training.

CLIENTS IN LITERACY PROJECTS SERVED BY VISTA VOLUNTEERS

In the mail survey Project Directors at sponsoring organizations answered a series of questions concerning their clients. Figure 3.1 displays the number of clients served by their literacy projects. The numbers range from a low of 10 clients to a high of 46,590. The median number of clients served was 220.

Table 3.2 provides a demographic description of clients. Most clients are 18 to 45 years old. Seventy percent have incomes at or below the poverty level. Most read at the lower elementary grade level. Two-thirds of the clients have at least a part-time job. There is a representative distribution of clients across gender and ethnic groups. Project Directors estimated that 47 percent of the clients lacked employment.

Our data showed that VISTA Volunteers assigned to VISTA Literacy Corps projects work primarily with low-income populations. The clients display some attributes of upward mobility of which the willingness to become literate is a primary indicator. None of the literacy projects we visited operated with any means test as a requirement for participation.

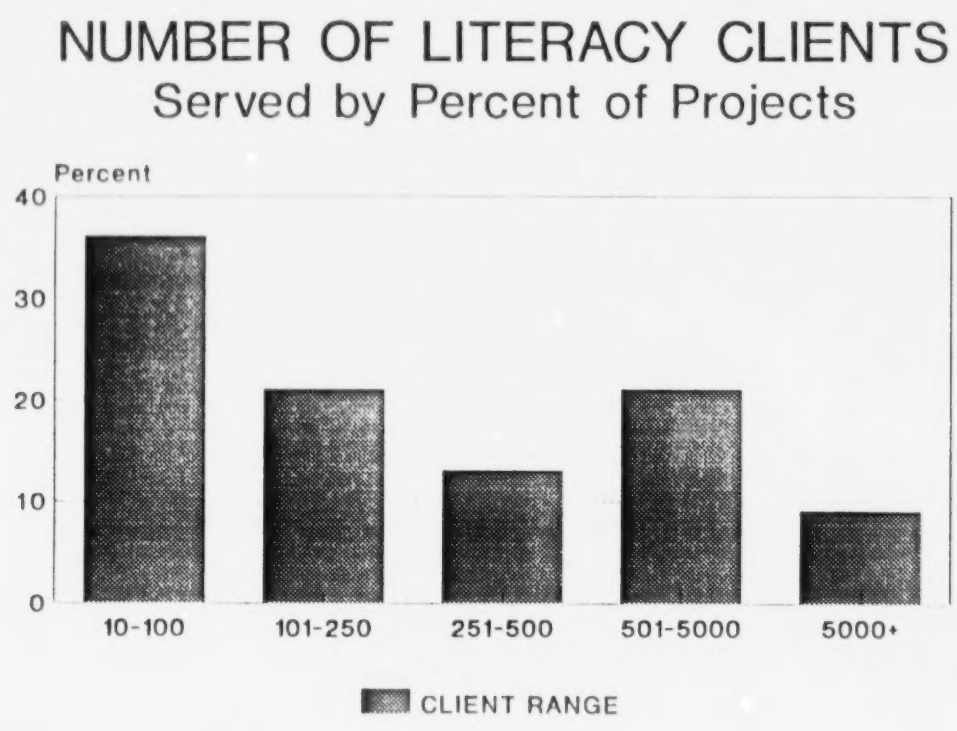

FIGURE 3.1

TABLE 3.2
Demographic Characteristics of Clients

Characteristics		Percent of Clients
Gender	Male	52%
	Female	48%
	TOTAL	100%
Ethnic Group	Hispanic	14%
	Black, non-Hispanic	24%
	White, non-Hispanic	48%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	11%
	Native American	3%
	TOTAL	100%
Age	17 years or less	7%
	18-25 years	24%
	26-45 years	49%
	46-60 years	14%
	61 or more	6%
	TOTAL	100%
Employment Status	Unemployed	47%
	Employed part-time	19%
	Employed full-time	34%
	TOTAL	100%
Reading Level at Project Entry	Grade 0-4	66%
	Grade 5-8	25%
	Grade 9-12	9%
	TOTAL	100%
Other	Family income at or below poverty level	70%
	Parents of children 2 to 8 years old	35%

* Source: Project Directors' Questionnaire

Clients served by the VISTA Literacy Corps Projects lived in communities where the median unemployment rate was 6.4 percent. This compares to a national unemployment rate of 5.7% percent in October, 1990. The Project Directors estimated that, in the community, 26 percent of the households were at or below the poverty level and 30 percent of the adults had less than a ninth-grade education.

The Project Directors reported that the projects provided individual instruction in basic literacy to most clients. Projects gave group instruction to 36 percent of their clients. The emphasis in most VISTA Literacy Corps projects is regular literacy training; they reach 81 percent of their clients through this approach. The projects conduct ESL training for 19 percent of the clients. The average length of time that clients receive services is 12.5 months.

EXAMPLE 3.3
Client Group: Migrants

Migrants are an "invisible group" usually encamped on farmlands in sub-standard housing out of sight of main highways. Isolated from local communities, they typically do not receive the services that are available to other community members. Like most impoverished groups, they have high rates of illiteracy. Nomadic lifestyles create difficulties for educating children and adults. California, Florida, and New York have more migrants than other States --largely due to their agricultural industries which demand seasonal workers. At one VISTA Literacy Corps Project, VISTA Volunteers are supporting a literacy effort in a multi-county area of a State noted for its agricultural production. Volunteers in this project have identified 400 to 600 migrant families, More than 100 single migrant men need training in ESL literacy. Volunteers are working with three types of migrants to improve their basic literacy skills.

- Interstate Migrants. This group is the largest of the three migrant groups. Crossing State lines, they arrive for spring planting, and stay for the summer. They leave after the fall harvest in September or late October. They usually work in privately owned farms, for logging companies, in produce and livestock processing plants, and in fisheries. At the end of the agricultural season these migrants return to their home base or their countries of origin. Many are, in fact, undocumented workers and represent a wide range of ethnic diversity. Most true migrants have virtually no educational skills.

- Intrastate Migrants. These migrants are mostly lower-socioeconomic-class members who work on dairy farms or smaller farms growing truck crops for local cities. They often live in trailers or local cottages. This group typically has a high degree of mobility across county lines. This results in similar problems of school enrollment and educational disruption as seen in true migrant populations.

- Resettling Migrants. A third group of migrants are those trying to resettle in an area with permanent employment in industrial or service-sector jobs. Given their lack of educational skills, this group can only take unskilled jobs. Most migrants contemplating resettlement appear to recognize the need to enroll in ED classes.

CHAPTER FOUR
PROJECT OPERATIONS

The VISTA Volunteer Handbook (Revised 12/87) stresses that VISTA Volunteers are to:

> "perform meaningful and constructive volunteer service in agencies, institutions, and situations where the application of human talent and dedication may assist in the solution of poverty and poverty-related problems and secure and exploit opportunities of self-advancement by persons afflicted with such problems (1987:ii)."

ACTION advises sponsors that they should not use VISTA Volunteers in general clerical or secretarial staff positions. Volunteers should not displace employed workers. Neither should they engage in any duties that could impair existing contracts for services (VISTA Volunteer Handbook 1987:104).

The project site visits showed that the VISTA Volunteers were performing a variety of functions that are in compliance with VISTA guidelines. Volunteers are developing new activities. They are managing existing projects in bold and imaginative ways. Volunteers are working with disadvantaged populations. They are targeting their efforts at poor people.

In this chapter, we present an analysis of

- VISTA Volunteer Recruitment, Training, and Preparation.
- Volunteer and project activities.
- The effectiveness of volunteers.
- Recommendations from VISTA Volunteers on improving the program.

RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, AND PREPARATION OF VISTA VOLUNTEERS

Project Directors said that they primarily recruited their VISTA Volunteers locally. Most frequently they recruited Volunteers by word-of-mouth (73 percent). Other recruitment tactics included newspaper advertisements (58 percent), prior contact with the Volunteer as a client or tutor (55 percent), and referral by ACTION (42 percent). Only 12 percent of the Directors said they used radio or television announcements to recruit VISTA Volunteers.

VISTA Volunteers reported that they received an average of 42 hours of training by ACTION, projects, or both. Project Directors stated that Volunteers averaged 26 hours of initial training and an additional 38 hours later in the project year, for a total of 64 hours from ACTION, the project, or both. Table 4.1 displays the major training topics by source

of training as reported by the Project Directors. This training refers only to that provided after ACTION's Pre-Service Orientation.[1]

TABLE 4.1
Training Topics Provided to VISTA Volunteers According to Project Directors*

Topic	Percent of Projects Saying Training was Provided by:	
	Sponsor	Other
Goals and objectives of the sponsoring organization	92%	7%
Activities to be performed at the sponsoring organization	87%	12%
Use of local volunteers as literacy tutors	82%	30%
Communication/public relations	78%	38%
Project record keeping	77%	12%
Materials for literacy tutoring	65%	40%
Approaches to literacy tutoring	63%	42%
Training of literacy tutors	63%	42%
Administration/management of a literacy project	63%	28%
Fund-raising	45%	30%

* Neither rows nor columns add to 100% since respondents could choose more than one option.

We did ask VISTA Volunteers to include ACTION's Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) in their assessments. Table 4.2 shows that ACTION's VISTA Pre-service Orientation Training is addressing VISTA issues. Later training by sponsoring organizations concentrates on preparing VISTA Volunteers for their assigned tasks. Outside sources provide additional training primarily in literacy and communication/public relations. Fund-raising is not the focus in any type of training events.

[1]ACTION had increased its average Pre-Service Orientation to 32 hours (4 days) and developed a standard curriculum prior to the data collection; however interviewees had received the orientation prior to the change.

TABLE 4.2
Training Topics Provided to VISTA Volunteers According to VISTA Volunteers*

Topic	Percent of Volunteers Saying Training was Provided by:		
	Sponsor	ACTION	Other
Goals and Objectives of Vista	36%	81%	4%
VISTA administrative procedures	26%	77%	4%
Goals and objectives of the sponsoring organization	83%	17%	6%
Activities to be performed at the sponsoring organization	80%	24%	7%
Use of local volunteers as literacy tutors	66%	20%	20%
Communication/public relations	68%	35%	30%
Project record keeping	68%	12%	28%
Materials for literacy tutoring	64%	19%	27%
Approaches to literacy tutoring	64%	19%	27%
Training of literacy tutors	58%	10%	25%
Administration/management of a literacy project	64%	22%	17%
Fund-raising	64%	22%	17%

* Neither rows nor columns add to 100% since respondents could choose more than one option.

Active VISTA Volunteers noted receiving several useful areas of training, as shown in Table 4.3. Communication skills/public relations was selected by the most Volunteers (38 percent). Second was training of literacy tutors (33 percent), third, approaches to literacy tutoring (29 percent), and fourth, VISTA goals (24 percent). The least useful area of training was fund-raising according to 27 percent of the VISTA Volunteers. Additionally, 15 percent of the VISTA Volunteers emphasized that record keeping information was not useful. Twelve percent stressed that they did not feel that the training in VISTA administrative procedures was useful.

TABLE 4.3
Usefulness of Training Topics as Ranked by VISTA Volunteers

Usefulness	Training Topic	Rank Order
Most Useful	Communication/public relations	1st
	Training of literacy tutors	2nd
	Approaches to literacy tutoring	3rd
	VISTA goals	4th*
	Materials for literacy training	5th
Least Useful	Fund-raising	1st
	Record keeping	2nd
	VISTA administrative procedures	3rd
	Administration/management of a literacy program	4th
	VISTA goals	5th*

* While the positions of VISTA goals may appear contradictory, they merely suggest a bi-polar reception. That is, those reporting the training as favorable were very supportive, and those reporting the training as unfavorable were very negative.

We asked former VISTA Volunteers if there were areas in which they felt additional training by ACTION and sponsors would have been useful. The most frequently mentioned areas were: fund-raising/grant-writing (10 percent), networking in the community (7 percent), and having more materials for literacy and ESL training (6 percent).

VOLUNTEER AND PROJECT ACTIVITIES

In this section, we give an overview of the activities of VISTA Volunteers and projects. We first describe Volunteer activities using the data from the surveys. We then profile the projects by level of organization -- statewide, multi-county, and local.

Volunteer Activities

By January 1991, active VISTA Volunteers responding to the mail survey had been working in their project an average of 15.3 months. VISTA Volunteers reported that they worked with various literacy subgroups at their project sites. Twenty-four percent were working with non-English speakers, 19 percent with school dropouts, and 11 percent each with senior citizens and parents of young children (see Figure 4.1).

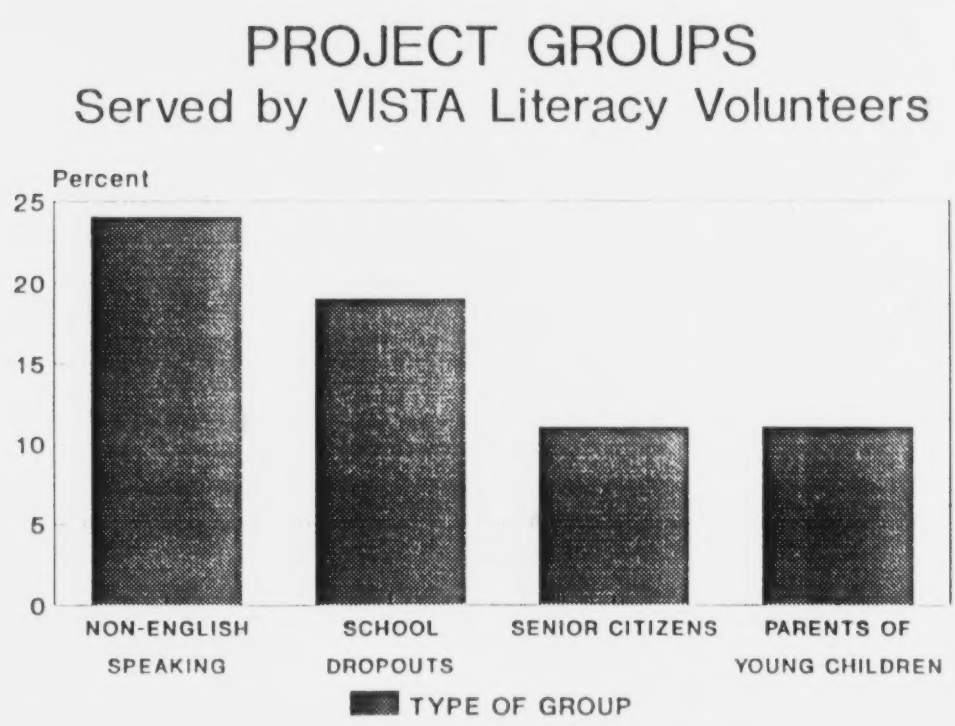

FIGURE 4.1

Table 4.4 provides information on the activities that VISTA Volunteers perform. Data for active Volunteers comes from the mail survey of Project Directors. Data for former Volunteers comes from the telephone survey of former Volunteers. The data show that more than 90 percent of the active and former VISTA Volunteers performed three major activities: client recruitment, public awareness, and recruitment of tutors and community volunteers. Other activities differ between the two groups. The most pronounced differences are for general office administration and client instruction. Former VISTA Volunteers reported more involvement in these activities than Project Directors did for active Volunteers.

TABLE 4.4
VISTA Volunteer Literacy Activities

Type of Activity	Active Vols*	Former Vols (N = 153)
Client recruitment	95%	90%
Community outreach/public awareness	95	95
Recruitment of literacy tutors of other volunteers	92	92
Development of outreach/promotional materials	85	85
Assessment of client needs	77	82
Project record keeping	77	89
Training of literacy tutors	65	60
Evaluation of client progress	60	69
Fund-raising	55	43
Curriculum development	42	55
Individual instruction/tutoring of clients	42	64
Development of management or administrative systems	42	56
Instruction/tutoring of clients in groups	35	63
General office administration	35	75

* Based on 60 Project Directors

TABLE 4.5
Hours Per Week VISTA Volunteers Spend in Project Activities
(N=313 VISTA Volunteers)

Type of Activity	Average Hours Per Week
Client recruitment	5.9
Community outreach/public awareness	5.5
Recruitment of literacy tutors of other volunteers	3.8
Project record keeping	3.5
Development of outreach/promotional materials	2.8
Assessment of client needs	2.8
General office administration	2.7
Individual instruction/tutoring of clients	2.3
Evaluation of client progress	2.3
Instruction/tutoring of clients in groups	1.7
Training of literacy tutors	1.6
Curriculum development	1.6
Fund-raising	1.5
Development of management systems	1.3
Other (i.e., interagency coordination, management of conferences, report preparation)	1.1
Total Average Hours per Week per Volunteer	**40.8**

Active Volunteers also spend the largest share of their time on client recruitment, community outreach, and recruitment of tutors and community volunteers (see Table 4.4). This outcome agrees with the results reported by former VISTA Volunteers. The fourth most time-demanding task for both active and former VISTA Volunteers is record keeping, that is, clerical work, file maintenance, and other paperwork as defined in the Volunteer questionnaires (see Appendices). Furthermore, active VISTA Volunteers estimated that they met with their Project Directors, an average of 4.2 hours each week. On average, active VISTA Volunteers spend slightly more than 40 hours per week in all activities. Directors estimated they spend an average of 14.5 hours a week supervising VISTA Volunteers.

A total of 307 VISTA Volunteers were serving in the 60 project sites that responded to our questionnaire. The average site had 5.1 VISTA Volunteers. Discounting the two large statewide projects, each site averaged 4.7 VISTA Volunteers. Table 4.6 presents the distribution of Volunteers by projects.

TABLE 4.6
Number of VISTA Volunteers Serving at Project Sites (N=60)

No. of Volunteers Per Site	Percent of Projects
0 **	2%
1	10
2	19
3	27
4	7
5	8
7	2
8	7
9	7
10	3
15	3
18	2
19	2
26	2

* The total percent adds to more than 100 percent due to rounding.

** One site was still awaiting their VISTA Volunteer.

There are typically two or more VISTA Volunteers at each project. Thus, we asked Project Directors to comment on the extent to which their VISTA Volunteers performed the same activities. Most Directors (63 percent) reported that Volunteers perform separate activities. One-fourth of the Directors said that Volunteers perform the same tasks. Twelve percent reported some overlap, but with distinct responsibilities also.

EXAMPLE 4.1
VISTA Volunteers: A Sample of What They Are Doing

- Recruiting literacy tutors and students through public information campaigns, including speaking to service clubs, at libraries and schools.
- Designing and distributing brochures.
- Contacting media to issue information on VISTA projects.
- Conducting initial diagnostic student assessments and referrals for councils/agencies.
- Coordinating tutor-training sessions and helping tutor support groups.
- Recruiting students to tutor ABE/ESL classes and other activities (for example, correspondence-type home study for the GED).
- Providing on-going support to families via telephone, mail, and personal contact; helping them with child care, job-readiness training, food, and other concerns that prevent their participation in literacy efforts.
- Arranging one-on-one tutoring sessions, and helping in the formation of GED and ESL classes in camps and at schools.
- Developing a social-services referral guide for the staff.
- Negotiating with low-income housing project managers and tenant associations for the use of a phone line, classroom space, and on-site GED instruction.
- Conducting door-to-door recruitment in the housing projects, and preparing brochures for distribution.
- Working with ABE teachers to devise lessons and exercises appropriate for beginning literacy students.
- Operating a literacy project for prisoners at the county jail.
- Developing and maintaining the student/tutor data base for project record keeping.

Project Activities by Level of Project Organization -- Statewide, Multi-County, and Local

Activities of Statewide Projects. Statewide projects include a variety of sites that include an extensive range of activities. Volunteers work in client and tutor recruitment, tutor training, fund-raising, record keeping, and communication systems development. They work with the urban poor and in rural areas with migrant populations.

We describe some examples of VISTA contributions to specific statewide projects below.

Utah A VISTA Volunteer prepared and distributed a statewide literacy newsletter, while also developing a statewide directory of literacy providers. The Volunteer also monitored calls to a literacy hotline and helped in the planning of the recent Literacy Volunteers of America national conference held in Salt Lake City.

California Volunteers in Santa Cruz and Modesto focus many of their activities on ESL, which reflects the many immigrants arriving in the state. In Fresno, VISTA Volunteers have been very successful in fund-raising. They have also been instrumental in designing a workplace literacy program. In both Fresno and Modesto, VISTA Volunteers have developed and managed literacy computer labs. Santa Cruz Volunteers were exploring the ways to address the literacy needs of "learning disabled adults." In some small agricultural communities (for example, Gilroy and Watsonville), Volunteers helped Hispanics in ABE programs and expanded "Friends of the Reading Program." In Fremont, one Volunteer started a refugee tutorial service primarily serving a large Afghan population in the San Francisco area.

Washington In Seattle, VISTA Volunteers are shifting their ESL instruction from Hispanics to new Asian immigrants as part of an integrated social service program in local housing authorities. In the north, around Bellingham, Volunteers conduct ABE classes and provide outreach ESL training to tutors working with newly arrived agricultural workers who are mainly Hispanic. In Bellevue, VISTA Volunteers helped design a program called "Talktime" at the community college, which helps students acclimate to their new culture. In Tacoma, Volunteers trained ESL tutors for the State Department of Refugee Assistance.

Activities of Multi-County Projects. Volunteers in multi-county projects work with rural and urban poor and in economically depressed areas that have transient populations with high rates of illiteracy. We describe highlights of the contributions of Volunteers in these projects below:

Arizona VISTA Volunteers manage tutor/client matches, aid outreach to rural areas outside of Phoenix and develop new literacy projects in other counties. ACTION-referred VISTA Volunteers (Volunteers referred to the project by ACTION and almost always from outside the project's community) have made major contributions in these efforts and have been instrumental in devising and managing new projects. For example, one VISTA Volunteer introduced a literacy program in the county jail. The State courts have funded computer literacy labs for all probationers/parolees, which VISTA Volunteers are managing.

Kentucky/Iowa Community and State colleges run the literacy projects visited in Kentucky and Iowa. VISTA Volunteers work in ABE and help clients in preparing for GED exams. VISTA Volunteers are important assets in recruiting literacy tutors and promoting public awareness of the availability of literacy training.

Maryland The Project Director recruited VISTA Volunteers nationally to serve as program managers. These VISTA Volunteers operate all of the literacy efforts in a tri-county area of rural Maryland.

New York VISTA Volunteers are responsible for identifying migrant workers in upstate New York who need literacy training. They recruit tutors, conduct training, and track migrant activities in education. They also work closely with other agencies concerned with migrant education.

Pennsylvania In State College, VISTA Volunteers have aided in developing ESL programs for recent immigrants. VISTA Volunteers are developing a video program to show the efforts of the Literacy Council. This video should prove effective in local fund-raising activities.

Rhode Island VISTA Volunteers work with the State's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. They participate in ESL literacy programs and recruit tutors. Volunteers also match tutors with clients and work in other areas of community need. As part of these ESL efforts, VISTA Volunteers helped to develop an information clearing-house on refugee and immigrant issues.

Activities of Local Projects. Local VISTA Volunteers work in essentially the same activity areas as identified for multi-county projects. In some instances, VISTA Volunteers in local projects developed innovative literacy projects.

Alabama VISTA Volunteers work with Selma community public service projects. They identify students, recruit tutors, and match literacy tutors with clients.

Arkansas One VISTA Volunteer began a workplace literacy program with one of the community's major employers. The company permitted release time for clients and tutors. VISTA Volunteers developed workplace materials and set up a workplace library for basic literacy sources. In addition, VISTA Volunteers are testing students, keeping records and starting a skills lab.

North Carolina VISTA Volunteers have helped the local employment service agencies in canvassing households to recruit students and tutors interested in literacy training. They have also set up a local reading hour for "drop ins." These can, if interested, become more formally involved in the literacy project.

Ohio In Columbus, VISTA Volunteers help with a hotline and participate in the "Ready to Read" literacy program. Cincinnati VISTA Volunteers manage literacy activities, recruit tutors, and publish an "East-Ender Community Newsletter" describing community action activities.

Oklahoma VISTA Volunteers independently began a computerized record keeping system for matching clients and tutors. They were also responsible for community outreach efforts using satellite libraries to promote literacy training.

Texas VISTA Volunteers aid in the work of the Travis County Literacy Council. The Volunteers do fund-raising, grant-writing, tutor training, and data base maintenance. One VISTA Volunteer played a key role in beginning a Tutor Training Center in Austin.

VOLUNTEER EFFECTIVENESS

We treat the subject of Volunteer effectiveness in two ways. First, we report the views of Project Directors and Volunteers as shown in the survey data. Second, we present what we learned on effectiveness during our site visits to the projects.

Volunteer Effectiveness as Shown in the Survey Data

We asked the Project Directors to identify the most effective and ineffective activities of the VISTA Volunteers. They cited four activities as being the most effective: community outreach (72 percent), client recruitment (47 percent), tutor recruitment (45 percent), and tutor training (30 percent). Directors named six activities that Volunteers did less effectively: fund-raising, office administration, development of management systems, client needs assessment, record keeping, and curriculum development.

Active VISTA Volunteers believed that they were most effective in community awareness/outreach (44 percent). The second most effective activity, listed by 33 percent of the Volunteers, was client recruitment. Least effective in the opinion of the active Volunteers was fund-raising, mentioned by one in four (27 percent).

Former VISTA Volunteers also identified activities that they thought were most effective or successful. The four most effective were community awareness/outreach (28 percent), individual tutoring (20 percent), tutor training (17 percent), and tutor recruitment (12 percent). Activities mentioned most frequently as ineffective or less successful were community awareness/outreach (19 percent), fund-raising (14 percent), tutor recruitment (13 percent), and client recruitment (13 percent).

We find two discrepancies in the viewpoints of former Volunteers and Project Directors. Where Directors rate Volunteers highly on community outreach and tutor recruitment, the Volunteers rate themselves as relatively ineffective.

Former VISTA Volunteers named three of the four effective activities identified by the Project Directors. These activities are community awareness/outreach, tutor recruitment, and tutor training. Former VISTA Volunteers and their Directors both agreed that fund-raising is ineffective.

Opinions on Effectiveness Gained During the Site Visits

We made an effort during the site visits to seek information on the projects' effectiveness. We talked with VISTA Volunteers, Project Directors, and persons in other organizations or the local community. Our researchers described this process as "what was being accomplished" by the project or whether the volunteer was "producing the intended effect."

We asked Project Directors and VISTA Volunteers what it took to be an effective volunteer. One Director was very succinct and said, "They have to have a heart." This comment characterized others received at many of the sites visited. Directors were often more concerned with the interpersonal skills and attitudes of Volunteers than with the technical skills they brought to the literacy project. One Volunteer said of her VISTA literacy experience, "With God's help, I want to bring out the best in someone else." Another Volunteer described her efforts to instruct literacy tutors. She said, "It satisfies my desire to teach without having to deal with the formality of teaching."

Project Directors verbalized many observations about VISTA Volunteers. One Director stressed that Volunteers are an important resource for adult education. Another said that VISTA Volunteers provide critical skills in the field of adult education. Several Directors commented on the dedication and the competency of the VISTA Volunteers assigned to their projects. Another Director said, "The project wouldn't even be in operation without the VISTA Volunteers. They bring just the right kind of expertise and initiative."

In one of the rural projects visited, a local school superintendent said, "VISTA Volunteers act as agents between the community and the school, where often people are just too shy to come to school to acquire the skills they need in the community." Another educator said that the Volunteers have given literacy efforts an entirely new resource for reaching members of the community who are at a low educational level.

Two Project Directors noted that some VISTA Volunteers were only looking for a job and cared little about the project's mission. Negative comments about volunteer effectiveness, however, were uncommon. Most Directors felt that VISTA Volunteers are providing a much-needed resource to their literacy projects. They are expanding the capacity of the projects to deliver literacy services to a larger, more diversified audience.

A good indicator of the effectiveness of the VISTA Volunteers was that almost every Project Director wanted to continue the VISTA Literacy Corps project. Directors see VISTA Volunteers as hardworking and caring about what they are doing. Most Volunteers provide at least one year of service to the project.

Many use their VISTA experience to help gain employment from the organization in which they served as a VISTA Volunteer. The large majority viewed their VISTA experience as positive and their efforts as effective. In the survey portion of the study, we got information on the Volunteers' perception of their effectiveness as VISTA Volunteers. Figure 4.2 shows the results. Ninety-two percent of the active Volunteers and 89 percent of the former Volunteers rated themselves as effective or very effective.

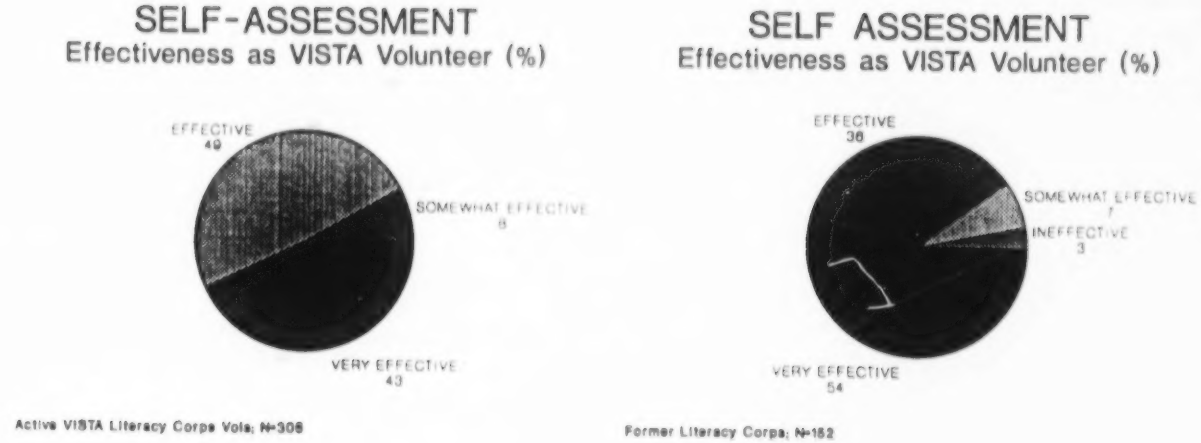

FIGURE 4.2

Overall, VISTA Volunteers felt that their activities have been effective. Few Volunteers felt that their services were not useful to the project. In one project, a volunteer lamented, "There is too much clerical work expected." Most VISTA Volunteers, however, saw paperwork as needed for proper record keeping. During the site visits, researchers did not see any instances of an inappropriate use of a VISTA Volunteer.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM VISTA VOLUNTEERS ON IMPROVING THE PROGRAM

VISTA Volunteers, both current and former, urged that the following changes would improve the effectiveness in the VISTA Literacy program.

- **Provide more opportunities for interaction among VISTA Volunteers.** This could be done in in-service training. Volunteers wanted to know what other VISTA Volunteers were doing in literacy and the kinds of problems they were meeting and their solutions.

- **Generate greater public/community awareness about VISTA and the activities of the VISTA Literacy Corps.** They felt a more concerted public relations effort could help fund-raising and the recruitment of VISTA Volunteers. These Volunteers wanted to have the same kind of "esprit de corps" that characterizes other special groups.

- **Raise the rate of reimbursement for travel.** Volunteers considered seventeen cents per mile inadequate, considering increased transportation costs. The mileage requirement for VISTA should be consistent with the rate for Federal employees ($.25 per mile). Volunteers felt that their travel expenses should be reimbursed. Their subsistence allowance is not enough to cover these costs. The mileage allowance for many rural sites is often inadequate to meet project goals.

- **Reassess whether the present Volunteers' subsistence allowance is enough to meet the living needs of active VISTA Volunteers.** Many active VISTA Volunteers stated they could only afford to be a VISTA for one year because of the current amount.[2]

- **Permit VISTA Volunteers to tutor literacy clients.** Nearly all Volunteers reported doing some tutoring to learn about literacy problems. They would like to do more. VISTA allows tutoring during the first two months of service as part of their training period. Although Section 109 (d) (1) of PL 99-551 permits Volunteers to provide one-on-one tutoring, Congress has not funded this provision of the act.

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[2] ACTION completed a revised set of subsistence allowance guidelines, as authorized by Congress, after the data collection phase of the evaluation had ended.

CHAPTER FIVE
PROJECT EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPACT

We have organized our analysis of project effectiveness and impact into two parts:

- Project impact, on communities and VISTA Volunteers.
- Project sustainability.

PROJECT IMPACT

Every Project Director and VISTA Volunteer interviewed during the site visits felt that their project was effective. They all believed that they were recruiting tutors and helping clients gain literacy skills. Survey data revealed that the median number of clients served by the projects was 220. Table 5.1 shows, for the 18 projects we visited, the numbers of clients and tutors. Four of the projects had information on clients but not on tutors. One project had information on tutors but not on clients. Thus, the total number of client and tutors shown in Table 5.1 are underestimates.

While some projects collected information on what they were accomplishing, most projects did not. Our researchers found that few projects had set up procedures for regularly collecting client outcome information. Most of the data collected concerned the number of clients projects served. These data were usually in annual reports submitted to the Literacy Volunteers of America national office or Laubach International headquarters.

Project Directors and VISTA Volunteers often substituted anecdotes for statistical data to illustrate project effectiveness. One Project Director said of her project, "Students come in creeping through the door and leave with their heads high." Directors often related how their clients were able to gain better jobs, get driver licenses, or prepare for GED exams after being the recipient of services from a literacy project.

VISTA Volunteers were proud of the personal growth of tutors as they interacted with their students. Over and over, tutors told of how rewarding it was to see the self-esteem of their students dramatically increase in a matter of months. Much of the information available at the projects on effectiveness was anecdotal. In spite of this, our researchers saw clearly that the VISTA Volunteers were playing important roles in addressing literacy at their respective projects.

TABLE 5.1
Service Area and Service Levels for the 18 Projects Visited

Location	Service Area	No. of Clients	No. of Tutors
Statewide			
California	Statewide	1,750	1,340
Utah	Statewide	381	215
Washington	Statewide	436	694
Multi-County			
Arizona	6 counties	800	800
Iowa	3 counties	300	204
Kentucky	4 counties	118	53
Maryland	2 counties	**	27
New York	4 counties	700	**
Pennsylvania	3 counties	435	250
Puerto Rico	8 counties	356	**
Rhode Island	2 counties	615	**
Local			
Alabama	County	103	43
Arkansas	County	130	120
OH-Cincinnati	Inner-City	70	**
OH-Columbus	Inner-City	252	274
North Carolina	County	66	78
Oklahoma	City/county	52	600
Texas	City/county	320	300
TOTALS		6,884	4,998

** No data available

For the projects reporting, the Directors presented a positive picture of overall improvement. Only a minority of projects, however, had data to support the stated increase, expansion, or improvement. The types of data that projects collect essentially focus on measuring the effectiveness of literacy and not other programmatic concerns. Figure 5.1 summarizes the Project Directors' reports on what they used to assess literacy results.

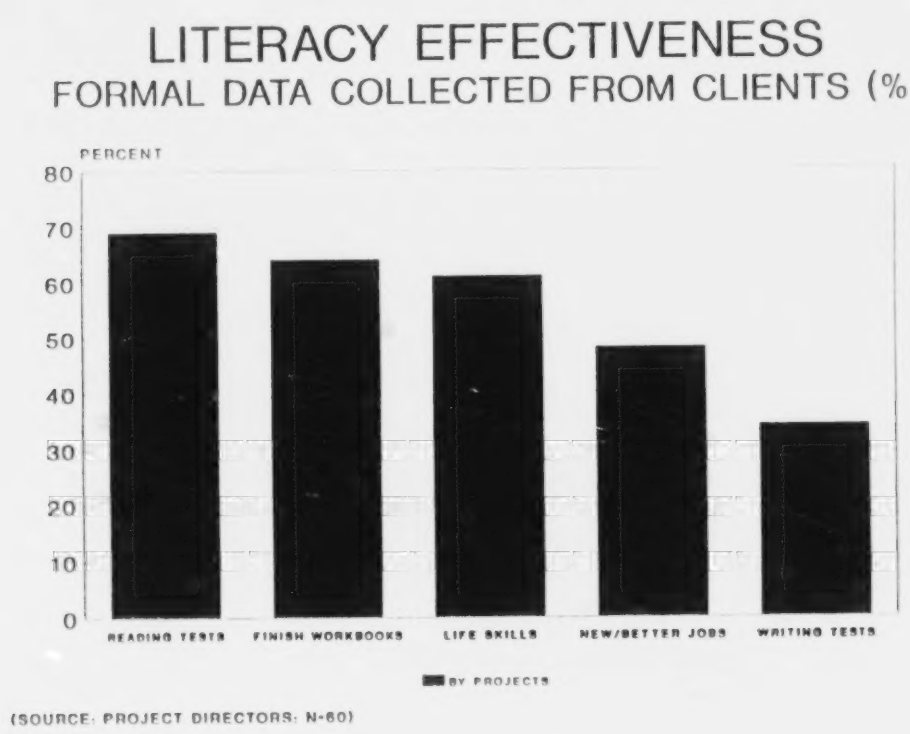

Figure 5.1

How Project Directors Assess Impact

In this section, we describe the judgements of Project Directors on the impact of VISTA Volunteers. We also report the suggestions made by Project Directors on how to improve the program.

Project Directors' Judgement on the Impact of VISTA Volunteers. Project Directors reported on the areas in which their projects and clients directly benefitted from the presence of VISTA Volunteers. Table 5.2 gives a summary of the results attributed to VISTA Volunteers. Volunteers were most influential in interagency cooperation and increasing the number of regular literacy clients. For those effects in Table 5.2 that are quantifiable, we asked the Project Directors to estimate the size of the effects. Table 5.3 presents the results. Where Volunteers had an effect, Directors credited them with

increasing the number of clients. Regular literacy clients increased by an average of 249, ESL clients by 204, tutors by 112, and community volunteers by 51. Project Directors estimated that client reading grade levels increased an average of 3.4 grade levels while VISTA Volunteers were working at the project.

TABLE 5.2
Service Results Project Directors Attributed to VISTA Volunteers

Outcome	Percent Projects
Increased cooperation or partnerships with other projects	83%
Increased number of regular literacy clients served	78%
Increased number of tutors	73%
Expanded project to different parts of community	72%
Expanded project to serve different types of clients	63%*
Improved effectiveness of tutors	60%
Developed plans for new literacy projects or areas	55%
Increased number of other volunteers	48%
Increased number of ESL clients served	45%
Improved management or administrative systems	43%**
Developed new assessments of community literacy needs	42%
Increased resources for operating the project	40%
Increased average reading level	23%

* The most frequently cited new client groups were non-English speakers (13 percent of projects) and the poor/homeless (10 percent).

** The most frequently cited areas of improved systems were computerization (10 percent), tutor and client tracking (7 percent) and record keeping (5 percent).

TABLE 5.3
How VISTA Volunteers Influenced the Effectiveness of VISTA Literacy Corps Projects, According to Project Directors

Outcome	Mean	Range	No. Projects
Increased number of regular literacy clients served:			
Before VISTA project	250	0 - 3,000	27
Since VISTA project	499	12 - 6,000	27
Increased number of ESL clients served:			
Before VISTA project	196	0 - 2,215	15
Since VISTA project	400	0 - 4,199	15
Increased number of tutors:			
Before VISTA project	118	0 - 809	25
Since VISTA project	230	5 - 1,010	25
Increased number of other volunteers:			
Before VISTA project	30	0 - 120	19
Since VISTA project	81	0 - 358	19
Increased average reading level (Grade Level):			
Before VISTA project	1.4	0 - 4.0	11
Since VISTA project	4.8	3.0 - 7.0	11
Increased resources for the operation of the project:			
Cash	$13,043	$2,000 - $75,000	15
In-kind	$ 9,452	$1,000 - $25,000	16

We investigated five variables to examine the extent to which they predicted project effectiveness. They were: (1) the number of years the sponsoring organization had been in operation; (2) whether literacy was the primary focus of the sponsoring organization; (3) the total annual cash budget of the organization for literacy; (4) the year in which VISTA Volunteers first joined the project; and (5) the number of VISTA Volunteers at the time of the survey. We used these factors as predictors in multiple-regression analyses with three dependent variables. The dependent variables were: (1) the mean project rating of effectiveness, as defined by VISTA Volunteers; (2) the number of areas of project impact as reported by Project Directors; and (3) the rating of sustainability of project activities (after VISTA Volunteers are gone) provided by the Project Directors.

The multiple-regression results were inconclusive. None of the three multiple-regression equations produced statistically significant results. The factors examined were thus not significant predictors of the outcome measures examined.

Suggestions from Project Directors. The Project Directors identified several changes that they felt would improve the overall effectiveness of their projects. These are:

- **Record keeping** This is an area where Project Directors felt that VISTA Volunteers could play a more important role. As the number of clients and tutors expand, Volunteers are likely to become more involved in compiling data and producing reports for funding agencies.

- **Partnering** Literacy training projects should expand to make efficient use of meager resources and to avoid duplication. Many literacy projects have been effective in developing activities with a specific focus while working with other groups in their areas of specialization.

- **ESL training** Projects should grow to meet the clear demand for English-as-a second-language literacy approaches. This training includes not only Spanish, but also East-Asian language groups (for example, Vietnamese, Hmong, Thai, Afghan, Pakistani) and, most recently, Eastern European languages.

Project Directors also identified additional issues that could help improve project effectiveness. They suggest that ACTION:

- **Improve** recruiting procedures and techniques. Several Project Directors said that it was becoming increasingly difficult to recruit VISTA Volunteers, especially in urban areas. They gave the low level of the current subsistence allowance as one reason. The Project Directors also said that more advertising about VISTA would help them to recruit VISTA Volunteers. Now, projects recruit most Vista Volunteers locally. They come from three types of backgrounds. First and most common, there are those who need a job and are receiving some type of public aid. Second in number are retirees and housewives who want to be busy or continue to make a social contribution. Third, there are recent college graduates with the motivation to volunteer.

- **Develop** greater efforts to recruit Volunteers at the national level to meet urban needs. There must be a better match between the supply and local demand for VISTA Volunteers. Most Project Directors said, in spite of recruitment problems, they would continue to recruit strictly at the local level. The advantage of local recruiting was the opportunity to interview candidates face-to-face. The inability of local Project Directors to meet potential VISTA Volunteers limits the recruitment of ACTION-referred Volunteers. Nonetheless, Project Directors recognized that ACTION-referred VISTA Volunteers brought fresh ideas to their projects.

The VISTA Volunteers' Views on Project Impact

We asked VISTA Volunteers to assess the impact of their projects on clients and communities. We also asked about the impact of VISTA service on their lives and careers.

Volunteers on Project Effectiveness. We asked the VISTA Volunteers to assess the effectiveness of their projects. Both active and former Volunteers rated their projects as being effective. Only 10 percent of the active VISTA Volunteers and 13 percent of the former Volunteers reported that their projects were "somewhat effective" or "not very effective." In short, VISTA Volunteers viewed their projects in a positive manner. Eighty percent of the active VISTA Volunteers viewed their projects as effective. Eighty-two percent of the former VISTA Volunteers reported their projects as successful.

Volunteers were asked in the survey to identify the improvements in the lives of literacy project clients. Table 5.4 lists the most frequently mentioned improvements, beginning with an increase in the clients' sense of self-worth or self-esteem. Active and former Volunteers also cited other types of improvement, such as increased reading enjoyment and enrollment in education programs. Improving literacy skills, thus, appears to have a wide range of ramifications for a person's life.

Impact on VISTA Volunteers. In the survey, we asked active Volunteers to assess how much their VISTA experience helped to improve their skills. Table 5.5 gives their responses. Most (93 percent) of the active VISTA Volunteers had a greater knowledge of literacy issues. More than two-thirds of the VISTA Volunteers reported improvement in their self-confidence, ability to get along with people, and motivation to do the job well. Former Volunteers' responses were similar.

We also asked the active Volunteers to identify the most important skills learned during their VISTA experience. The most important skills gained were knowledge of literacy (34 percent), meeting a variety of people (27 percent), and self-confidence (24 percent).

When we asked Volunteers to describe the one or two most important gains from their VISTA experience, the most frequent response was knowledge of literacy issues (40 percent). Other common responses included: satisfaction from helping people (31 percent), experience in meeting a variety of people (27 percent), and self-confidence (20 percent).

TABLE 5.4
Improvements in the Lives of Literacy Project Clients Reported by Active and Former VISTA Volunteers

Type of Improvement	Rank Order: Active Vols	Rank Order: Former Vols
Increase in sense of self-worth/self esteem	1st	1st
Increased personal enjoyment of reading	2nd	4th
Improved life skills (driver's licenses, citizenship, etc.)	3rd	2nd
Greater family satisfaction	4th	--
Improved ability to perform job functions	5th	6th
Greater involvement in children's learning	6th	10th
Increased enrollment in other education programs	7th	5th
New jobs or job promotions	8th	3rd
Greater community understanding of literacy issues	--	7th
Increased persistence/motivation	--	7th
New friendships or relationships	--	7th

TABLE 5.5
Effects of the VISTA Experience on VISTA Volunteers

Effect	Percent Active Vols	Percent Former Vols
Knowledge of literacy issues	93%	97%
Ability to teach or train others	82%	79%
Personal self-confidence	78%	88%
Motivation to do well on a job	76%	78%
Ability to plan and complete tasks and assignments	73%	79%
Ability to get along with different types of people who are clients	72%	84%
Ability to organize one's time	70%	75%
Ability to define life goals	68%	82%
Ability to get along with supervisors and co-workers	65%	75%
Reading and writing skills	54%	64%

Experience after VISTA. We asked former Volunteers several questions concerning their experiences after leaving VISTA. Of particular importance was why they left the project. The most frequent response (28 percent) was because they reached the end of their term of service. Twenty-three percent left because they got a job. Seventeen percent left for health or family reasons. Only four percent left because they did not like their Volunteer assignment.

We also asked about the employment status of former VISTA Volunteers. Sixty-seven percent of those contacted had jobs, 45 percent in full-time positions and 22 percent in part-time work. About two-thirds (69 percent) reported that their job derived from their VISTA experience. Twenty-eight percent of the former VISTA Volunteers were still working in the field of adult literacy. Seventeen percent were working with low income people or in human services. Seven percent were working in other areas of education.

Additionally, we asked about the school status of former VISTA Volunteers. Seventeen percent of those whom we interviewed were attending school, one-third of them full-time. Sixty-four percent of those still in school said they chose their course of studies because of their VISTA experience.

Volunteer Comments on their VISTA Experience. VISTA Volunteers talked positively about their experiences. Regardless of their varying socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, many Volunteers stressed that they had gained new skills (for example, using

a computer, office management, tutoring, training). They also increased their self-esteem, and become more focused about their life goals.

At one site, two Volunteers felt that their increased knowledge of computers and administration would enable them to find other jobs after VISTA service. For others, VISTA was their first position outside their home. Three Volunteers in a rural community in the Southeast claimed that the VISTA experience improved their public-relations and leadership skills. As a result, their confidence levels increased, enabling them to achieve higher goals. One Volunteer said of her VISTA experience that she gained self-confidence and learned "to get along with anybody, whether a low-income farm worker or a business executive." As a result of her experiences, she hopes to work in family literacy, helping parents and their children.

Other Volunteers said that they have become more aware of poverty and literacy issues. In discussing her work with immigrant populations, one VISTA said she gained a lot of insight from working with refugee and immigrant populations. Another Volunteer, who worked with migrant clients, learned about poverty in the migrant community and the problems of raising children under those conditions.

VISTA Volunteers frequently commented how much they had benefitted from their clients. A tutor from one rural area said of two Volunteers, "I have never seen two people enjoy what they do more than the VISTA Volunteers." Volunteers mentioned the personal reward they got watching the changes in peoples' lives as they become literate and capable of functioning independently in society. In fact, many VISTA Volunteers develop strong ties to their clients. One Volunteer reported that her clients treated her like a grandmother. Other Volunteers said that they became part of the family at Christmas and other special occasions.

Most Volunteer responses came from locally recruited Volunteers. One ACTION-referred VISTA Volunteer said that she had considerable trouble initially making the change to her new environment. She acknowledged that she did not get enough information about the area and the work conditions at the project. To ease this passage, she suggested that ACTION-referred Volunteers ask extensive questions during their interviews, which they usually conduct by phone. They should ask about such issues as what the project will expect of them, probable living arrangements, and other support. She also recommended that the Project Director encourage incoming VISTA Volunteers to speak with former VISTA Volunteers at the project. This way they could clarify any unrealistic expectations and improve their VISTA experience.

EXAMPLE 5.1
Project Impacts on VISTA Volunteers: Selected Comments

Our researchers had extensive conversations with VISTA Volunteers on what benefits they were experiencing. Here are some examples:

- "I used to be shy. Now I feel empowered and have faith in the system."
- "I've been offered a job by Catholic Relief Services; I never would have got that without VISTA."
- "I've met some great folks, learned a lot I didn't know about kids and health issues, learned about the extent of poverty in our community and the problem of raising children in those conditions."
- "Where before [working for Social Services] I was directing clients, now I've learned how to motivate clients to help themselves."
- "VISTA gave me the chance to use my community networking skills and to learn about migrancy issues."
- "I learned teaching skills through VISTA. I plan to work as a paid tutor in the school system after I finish my VISTA service."
- "I'm no longer afraid of speaking in public; I used to freeze up but now I am far more at ease."
- "VISTA has taught me the art of patience and I've come to cherish even small accomplishments."
- "As a VISTA Volunteer, I learned a lot about social service agencies and how they work with their clients."
- "Working in literacy has taught me how difficult it is for the functionally illiterate to thrive in this society."
- "I have gained a more positive outlook on life and a better perspective on the personal problems of others; it is exciting to meet people who really want to learn."

VISTA Volunteers are benefiting from their experience. Of course, increases in self-worth and skill level are not easy to measure. Still, Volunteers often referred to these as areas of personal gain. VISTA Volunteers concluded that they are receiving more from their clients than they give. One Volunteer summarized it this way:

> "The Literacy Corps has been a wonderful outlet to satisfy my need to give something back to America. For younger people, it would be a most effective way to serve America. . . to help make one independent, self-sufficient, literate, and appreciative of what one has. The WIIFM (what's in it for me) factor will surprise the giver."

Impact on the Project and Community

The impact of the VISTA Volunteers on their projects and communities has been positive. Project Directors, tutors, and clients told researchers of the important contributions that the VISTA Volunteers were making. VISTA Volunteers clearly made a difference in the level of services that the literacy projects could and did provide.

VISTA literacy projects have benefitted from the efforts of nationally recognized leaders to bring the issue of literacy to the forefront of the nation's consciousness. In many communities, local merchants and companies have made donations in the form of materials, office space, and even gasoline coupons. One Project Director reported considerable help from companies such as IBM, Walden Books, and AT&T to aid literacy activities. Building on the theme of volunteerism, many literacy councils have received free office space from community colleges, churches, or social service agencies. One rural Project Director reported local gasoline dealers had provided help to the VISTA Volunteers to help meet their mileage expenses.

VISTA Volunteers have directly affected poor communities where illiteracy rates are high. Such communities include migrant communities and housing projects. In one project that serves mostly migrant workers, Volunteers have coordinated the referral of more than 700 migrant workers to literacy/ESL activities. In addition, they found permanent employment for 25 migrants and twelve migrants received their GED diplomas through family literacy activities.

We saw Volunteers in several sites working hard to develop family literacy activities that involve entire families in the literacy learning process. In Seattle, VISTA Volunteers work with the Housing Authority in low-income housing projects to teach literacy to permanent and new residents. VISTA Volunteers also work with the Hispanic Center in the neighborhoods outside of Phoenix to improve the language skills of persons wanting U.S. citizenship.

Workplace literacy approaches have been successful in certain communities. One set up a literacy program at a corporation that employs 1,000 people in a rural county of about 24,000 people. Over 10 percent of the employees are said to participate in this literacy activity. At another site, a local agricultural industry moving toward automation has contracted with the literacy council to upgrade the skills of its workers.

EXAMPLE 5.2
WORKPLACE LITERACY: AN EMERGENT TREND IN LITERACY TRAINING

One of the recurring themes that researchers came across during their site visits was "workplace literacy." We saw two basic approaches to this literacy approach. In the first, employers wanting to provide specialized training to employees with a need such as automating or upgrading some aspect of a factory operation. In the second, employers sought to improve the level of literacy skills of their employees. Our researchers found that VISTA Volunteers are working mainly in the second type of workplace literacy. The first approach is done by contract firms and not by Volunteers.

In central California, we found VISTA Literacy Corps projects working with local fruit and vegetable packers to improve employee literacy as companies became more automated. Employers were very supportive of keeping their largely Hispanic work force while needing to upgrade the literacy levels of workers. In Arizona, a local literacy council was contracting with corporations such as Honeywell and AT&T to provide literacy training to employees. Here again, employers felt it was worth the investment in their workers. In central Texas, the local literacy council was about to start literacy training for several local companies. Literacy nonprofit organizations not only provide excellent training through the volunteer tutor approach to literacy but they do so at costs quite competitive with the private sector. VISTA Volunteers are playing an important role in these efforts.

Perhaps we found the most interesting example in the Southeast. Through the efforts of a single VISTA Volunteer, the community's major employer now supports an extensive workplace literacy approach involving students and tutors, almost 15 percent of the employees. The company provides release time and materials for those participating in this activity. Indeed, their last annual report stated, "A well-trained work force is essential to a successful manufacturing and marketing operation." The company wants to provide literacy training; VISTA Volunteers are an integral aspect of this effort.

Several literacy projects are using very innovative techniques for teaching literacy. The success of these new techniques has varied. For example, the use of videotapes to provide literacy instruction in a housing project in the Northeast proved ineffective. Technical problems resulted in poor sound quality and failed hookups. The project found that students were not comfortable with the technology. One even complained, "I want to see my teacher and I want my teacher to see me!" This technical approach experienced a high turnover rate because students preferred to learn reading by traditional methods of one-on-one teaching instruction. Another site discarded texts and moved to teaching literacy strictly with newspapers with notable success.

PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability involves the likely continuation of a project once VISTA resources end. It also involves the likelihood of continuing the quality and quantity of client services provided. We asked the Project Directors to comment on what would happen to their literacy projects when the VISTA Volunteers were no longer available. Table 5.6 presents their answers. Most Project Directors (70 percent) expected little change at the end of the VISTA project. We compared the Project Directors' responses with the length of their VISTA support. The Project Directors of newly funded projects were more optimistic about their projects becoming sustainable than the Project Directors of older projects.

TABLE 5.6
Project Director Views on the Withdrawal of VISTA Support

Effect on the literacy project	Percent of Directors According to Length of VISTA Support				Percent of All Directors (N=50)
	1st Year (N=11)	2nd Year (N=16)	3rd Year (N=15)	4th Year (N=8)	
Expansion in service	55%	6%	13%	0%	18%
Little change	9%	19%	27%	25%	20%
A few services lost	36%	38%	20%	50%	34%
Many services lost	0%	31%	40%	25%	26%
Project may be discontinued	0%	6%	0%	0%	2%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Almost half (45 percent) of the Project Directors thought they could get community volunteers to cover VISTA duties. Many Directors (30 percent) believed that increased local fund-raising could cover the loss of their VISTA Volunteers. Indeed, we found in our survey that VISTA Volunteers were more involved in fund-raising in the third year of the project than in the first two. One-fourth of the Directors stated that they were planning to add a paid position to their staff. It is likely that they will fill many of these positions with VISTA Volunteers at the end of their VISTA service.

During our site visits, we saw varying levels of planning for sustainability. One site had hired a consultant to help in long-range planning and gave one VISTA Volunteer primary responsibility for resource development. Most of the sites, however, have not developed any formal plans for sustainability Only a few had identified funding to support VISTA functions or a source of community volunteers to perform activities now performed by VISTA Volunteers. Thus, if the VISTA Literacy Corps Projects were all to end suddenly, many of the projects could have difficulty in becoming fully self-sustaining. We identified

three major factors during the site visits as strongly influencing the likelihood of a project operation continuing. They were: (1) funding strategies, (2) the project's market/support base, and (3) social policy issues unique to the region or community.

We found that the private, nonprofit projects were having more difficulty sustaining their operation, even with the VISTA Volunteers. Without VISTA, their continuation is far more problematic. On the other hand, these projects were also more innovative than their public counterparts. Their typically small size allowed them to try new approaches, such as workplace literacy, and to gain funding that public entities could not access. Literacy projects within educational settings usually cannot directly ask for money from businesses or charitable organizations (such as United Way) without setting up special mechanisms for channelling monies.

In contrast, we found that public entities had an easier time in planning their future because they have a more reliable resource base. Fierce competition exists for resources, however, and no agency is guaranteed a specific share of these resources. The most viable, non-public projects had long-range plans and were aware of the services they wanted to provide their clients.

Another important factor is the definition of a project's market and support base. The VISTA Literacy Corps program supported State, multi-county, and local projects. We cannot assess State projects (California, Washington, and Utah) for their sustainability because they represent a series of projects. Each of these may serve either a region of the State or a particular community. In fact, statewide projects did not have any real programmatic focus in contrast to the other types of projects.

For multi-county projects, the area served was large enough to have a clear need for literacy services and provide broad financial support. They were also small enough to involve key staff personally in operations and fund-raising. The projects also provided an opportunity to use and support several VISTA Volunteers adequately.

Local projects have the least likelihood of becoming sustainable. They are frequently too small, too isolated, too specialized, and too poor. One Project Director put it this way, "The smaller the town and population base, the more difficult it is to create a new volunteer tutoring program; I have not sought out small towns nor have I been sought out by any." These are, however, exactly the type of conditions in which VISTA Volunteers are to work.

EXAMPLE 5.3
ONE EXAMPLE OF PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

Researchers discussed the issue of sustainability with each of the Project Directors at the eighteen sites visited. One project clearly stood out on the issue of sustainability. A short description of that project follows.

By any measure, this project is a success. Located in the Midwest, the project has grown in size and scope. It continues to recruit community volunteer tutors and students, and funding efforts have been institutionalized in the local community to support the literacy efforts of this project.

The project continues to grow in response to the demand from the community. Moreover, the project focuses its growth on quality. Clients state that the instruction is sound, goal-oriented, and personal in focus. Most of the clients are either school dropouts or received not enough training in the public school system. The project has recently expanded training to clients in ESL. Some community organizations have provided support, and the literacy project has been highly visible on the media. During our visit, the Project Director participated in a short segment on a local television show. The literacy project is succeeding with clients the community responds with favor to its requests for help.

The project coordinator stressed the need to develop partnering strategies. This literacy project has managed to sidestep the turf battles that many literacy efforts frequently meet in communities. Rather than compete with others in the area of literacy, the city and county leaders have helped support one literacy project and have emphasized the sharing of resources, skills, and tasks. Public monies are provided to pay for the Project Director. The county library budget helps pay for space and materials.

The churches provide many volunteers to help maintain the office and conduct fund-raising events. The public school system in the last year has begun to provide two "reading specialists" to train literacy tutors. This assures that they can train one class of tutors (usually 15 to 20 per class) each month to provide a constant flow of tutors to a growing number of students.

This VISTA Literacy Corps Project can sustain its forward momentum. It has a solid base of institutional and community support, as well as several sources of funding. The opportunity existed to extend the VISTA Literacy Corps Project for a fourth year but it was not taken. The Project Director explained that it was time to end the project and depend on their own resources. Despite some retrenchment, public agencies continue to support the literacy project in funding and services in kind (for example, space, materials) as they explore other resource avenues to sustain their literacy efforts.

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PURPOSE

This evaluation had three goals. First, we sought to provide an overall description of the VISTA Literacy Corps. Second, we wanted to determine whether it is meeting its legislative mandate. Third, we were to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the VISTA Literacy Corps. This chapter presents a brief summary of the evaluation's findings and conclusions that address these goals. It also contains a set of recommendations to increase the impact and efficiency of the VISTA Literacy Corps.

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS

This evaluation provides information on the type and level of contributions VISTA Volunteers are making in the national effort to combat illiteracy. We are presenting the following specific findings to answer the evaluation's eight research questions.

1. **What is the nature of the projects in which VISTA Volunteers are serving?**

   The Project Director survey revealed that the sponsoring organizations of the VISTA Literacy Corps projects have a median age of 12 years. Fifty-nine percent of the sponsors, however, have been in operation for five years or less. These projects are relatively new and small and have only two to three project staff.

   According to the Project Director survey, 58 percent of the organizations sponsoring VISTA Literacy Corps projects provide literacy training as their primary focus. Other VISTA Literacy Corps project sponsors include colleges and universities, community action agencies, and local school systems. They all provide many other types of service in addition to literacy training.

   Project Directors reported that 56 percent of the VISTA Literacy Corps projects had from one to three Volunteers. Projects have a median of two paid staff members and two part-time staff assistants.

   Our research found that the VISTA Literacy Corps consists of three types of projects: statewide, multi-county, and local. Statewide projects centralize administration of several sites located throughout the State. Multi-county projects have a service area of two or more counties. Local projects limit their service area to one community or county. We found multi-county projects to be the most efficient type of arrangement for using the services of VISTA Volunteers. They can support and place more Volunteers than a local project because of their broad-based service area. They can provide better supervision of Volunteers than statewide projects and maintain a higher level of project integration.

2. **What are the characteristics of clients served by VISTA Literacy Corps projects?**

The Project Director survey documented that the median number of literacy clients served by VISTA Literacy Corps projects was 220, with a range from 10 to 46,590 clients. The extremely large number represents one statewide project.

Project Directors reported that most clients (52 percent) served by VISTA Literacy Corps projects are members of minority groups. Forty-seven percent do not have jobs. Seventy percent have family incomes at or below the poverty level. Sixty-six percent read at or below a fourth-grade reading level.

Project Directors reported that an average of 81 percent of their clients receive regular literacy instruction. Nineteen percent receive ESL instruction. Projects provide individual tutoring to 64 percent of their clients and 36 percent receive group instruction.

3. **What are the characteristics of VISTA Volunteers?**

The VISTA Volunteer survey revealed that VISTA Volunteers assigned to VISTA Literacy Corps projects are mostly females (84 percent) with an average age of 41 years. Most Volunteers (58 percent) are single and they average 16 months of service.

Survey data showed that 63 percent of the VISTA Volunteers are White (non-Hispanic). The rest are: 22 percent Black (non-Hispanic), 9 percent Hispanic, 2 percent Asian, and 2 percent Native American.

The most frequently used method to recruit VISTA Volunteers is "word of mouth" (used by 73 percent of the VISTA Literacy Corps projects).

The Volunteer survey showed that 42 percent of VISTA Volunteers reported being college graduates or had completed some graduate work. The average age for college graduates was 36 years (53 percent), where the mean age for VISTA Volunteers reporting some graduate work was 50 years (47 percent).

Based on the project site visits, we clustered the VISTA Volunteers into three groups. The most populous group is retired people or housewives who enter VISTA primarily to serve their local community. A second group consists of people from poverty backgrounds recruited into VISTA to gain experience for future employment opportunities. Third, there are the college graduates who entered VISTA to serve disadvantaged groups in the United States.

4. **What are the major activities of VISTA Volunteers? How successful are the Volunteers in these activities?**

The Volunteer survey revealed that the major activities of VISTA Volunteers are client recruitment, outreach, recruiting of tutors and other community volunteers, and record keeping. VISTA Volunteers spend an average of 41 hours per week working at these project tasks.

Project Directors reported that VISTA Volunteers were most effective in community outreach activities, tutor and client recruitment, and tutor training.

Forty-five percent of the VISTA Volunteers felt that their most effective activity was community awareness and outreach. The second most effective activity cited by Volunteers was client recruitment (36 percent).

Survey and site visit data both showed us that VISTA Volunteers are working at a wide variety of tasks approved under VISTA guidelines. These include client and tutor recruitment, community outreach, materials development, client assessment, and fund-raising activities.

It should be noted that 64 percent of the Volunteers report tutoring literacy clients for an average of four hours per week. They state this tutoring is done to learn more about literacy and the kinds of skills required of community volunteer tutors. Although Section 109 (d) of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act as amended in 1989 provides for the utilization of VISTA Volunteers for one-on-one tutoring, Congress has never appropriated funds for this purpose. While ACTION considers such tutoring an appropriate part of training to be a VISTA Volunteer, VISTA program guidelines do not permit one-on-one tutoring as an on-going assignment.

5. **What types of training do VISTA Volunteers receive, and is the training adequate?**

VISTA Volunteers reported receiving an average of 42 hours of training from their sponsoring organization. The most useful training the Volunteers reported receiving was in communication skills/public relations and tutor training. VISTA Volunteers rated training in fund-raising as least useful of all the areas rated This is consonant with the opinions of former Volunteers. When we asked them about the need for additional training, they most often mentioned training in fund-raising.

VISTA Volunteers reported that ACTION provided most of their training in Pre-Service Orientations (PSOs). Volunteers also reported that more specific training in literacy comes from the sponsoring organization. Many Volunteers felt, however, that more could be done (without specifying by whom) to provide needed intensive training in literacy approaches.

Literacy projects are increasingly serving ESL populations. Other emerging and expanding areas of need are workplace literacy, family literacy, and programs for the

learning disabled. Most VISTA Volunteers have little experience in these emergent areas of need and only limited training is available.

6. **What effects do the VISTA Literacy Corps projects have on clients, sponsoring organizations, and the broader community?**

The Volunteer survey showed that the most important effect of the VISTA Literacy Corps projects on clients, as reported by the Volunteers (97 percent), was the clients' increased self-esteem. Other reported effects on clients included: increased personal enjoyment of reading (86 percent), improved life skills (83 percent), greater family satisfaction (81 percent), and improved ability to work (80 percent).

Project Directors (83 percent) reported that the most important impact of VISTA Volunteers is that they increased cooperation or partnerships with other organizations. Other impacts were: more regular literacy clients served, more literacy tutors, larger projects to serve different clients, and increased effectiveness of literacy tutors.

Project Directors stated that VISTA Volunteers are making effective contributions. Discussions with community volunteer tutors and clients during site visits confirmed the effectiveness of services provided by Volunteers.

7. **What are the effects of the VISTA experience on the VISTA Volunteers? What are they doing after leaving VISTA?**

The former VISTA Volunteer survey documented the following most frequently reported results of service. Most (97 percent) of the former Volunteers said that they increased their knowledge of literacy issues. Eighty-eight percent reported an increase in personal self-confidence. Other significant results included: an improved ability to get along with different types of people, enhanced ability to define life goals, and better ability to teach or train others.

After leaving VISTA, 67 percent of the former VISTA Volunteers reported that they are working. Forty-six percent are in full-time positions and 22 percent in part-time. About two-thirds (69 percent) of those employed reported that their employment derived from their VISTA experience.

Twenty-eight percent of the former VISTA Volunteers reported continuing to work in the field of adult literacy after leaving VISTA. Seventeen percent were working with low-income persons in human services and 7 percent in education.

We asked former Volunteers about their current school status. Seventeen percent said they were attending school, six percent full-time, eleven percent part-time. Sixty-four percent of those in school claimed that their educational direction came from their VISTA experience.

8. **To what extent are the activities and functions performed by VISTA Volunteers sustainable after the VISTA Project?**

We asked Project Directors about the expected level of services once VISTA Volunteers completed their Volunteer service. Nineteen percent of the Directors believed there would be an expansion of services. Twenty percent thought there would be little change in client services. One-third (32 percent), however, believed their project would lose some services and 28 percent felt they risked losing many services. Only 2 percent of the Directors thought that their project would stop as a result of the loss of VISTA Volunteers.

Our three-day site visits to 18 VISTA Literacy Corps projects showed few projects preparing detailed plans to fund services by VISTA Volunteers once they completed their assignments.

CONCLUSIONS

We present the following conclusions as a result of our evaluation of the VISTA Literacy Corps.

- **The VISTA Literacy Corps is meeting its mandate to work with disadvantaged populations in areas of poverty.**

Title I, Part A, Sec. 101 of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 (PL 93-112) as amended in 1989, states, "the purpose of [VISTA] is to strengthen and supplement efforts to eliminate and alleviate poverty and poverty-related problems in the United States . . . ." Data from the three-day site visits and from the surveys showed that VISTA Volunteers are primarily working with disadvantaged populations. Seventy percent of the clients in the projects with which VISTA Volunteers serve come from areas associated with poverty. Literacy projects, however, do not have means tests for access to services. The participation of people above the poverty index shows that illiteracy is a problem for social classes other than the poor. VISTA Literacy Corps projects are working with clients who are "educationally at risk."

During the site visits, Project Directors said that VISTA Volunteers are making effective contributions in the projects in which they serve. Discussions with community volunteer tutors and clients confirmed the effectiveness of the services provided by the Volunteers.

- **Medium-sized VISTA Literacy Corps projects in multi-county settings are more effective than statewide or local projects in their ability to deliver quality services to their clients.**

These projects allow for greater interaction and exchange among VISTA Volunteers, and they are more manageable for supervision. Statewide projects are typically

collections of local projects that combine for administrative convenience. The geographic size of statewide projects limits coordination and information dissemination among Volunteers.

- **Most recruitment of VISTA Volunteers continues to be from the local community.**

  Local recruitment results in VISTA Volunteers who know their communities well and who often remain involved in literacy efforts after their VISTA experience. Still, Project Directors acknowledged difficulty in recruiting persons in some sites (particularity urban settings) and were willing to consider ACTION-referred VISTA Volunteers. Some Directors believed ACTION-referred Volunteers were more likely to offer fresh ideas for literacy activities. Directors, with one exception, were very positive about the contributions of ACTION-referred Volunteers recruited for their projects.

- **Training and supervision of VISTA Volunteers need to be flexible to meet the demands of a diverse Volunteer population.**

  We found three types of VISTA Volunteers. First, there were retired people and housewives who entered VISTA primarily to serve their local community. Second were persons from poverty backgrounds who projects recruited into VISTA to give them experience for future employment opportunities. Third were the recent college graduates who entered VISTA to serve others and examine their own life goals. The first and third groups required relatively little training and supervision. The second group, while needing more training initially, appeared to work very effectively in their communities and to achieve the highest level of personal rewards.

- **Training provided to VISTA Volunteers focuses too little on specific skill needs.**

  VISTA Volunteers receive limited training in newly emerging topics in literacy. They need more training from sponsoring organizations in topics such as ESL, workplace literacy, family literacy, and activities for the learning disabled.

- **Few literacy projects (including those funded by VISTA) devote resources for conducting formal community needs assessment or program evaluations.**

  Most literacy projects rely strictly on the use of available information (usually quite limited) or informal techniques for conducting needs assessments and evaluations. Their efforts included talking to applicants and clients, using local social service information, or making estimations of needs based on dated research findings and census data. While claiming that these techniques are enough, project leaders also recognize the demands by outsiders (that is, Federal or State agencies, local business concerns, etc.) for greater accountability. Because of the almost complete absence of outcome data, there exists a need for improved collection of evaluation data. Improving needs assessment and evaluation procedures could result in a better allocation of resources to literacy efforts.

- **Many VISTA Literacy Corps projects will have difficulty in becoming fully self-sustaining without the loss of some services when VISTA Volunteers are no longer available.**

  In the early years of any project, growth is the primary focus. Only when a project has a set client base and operating system does it typically focus on fund-raising and other resource-development activities. When these literacy projects lose their VISTA Volunteers, many will experience some loss of service to their clients. Project Directors are only doing limited planning for making their projects self-sufficient in funding. Projects need more technical assistance to prepare for this change.

PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

- **ACTION should keep literacy as a programmatic focus within the VISTA program.** Literacy training addresses a major cause of economic deprivation.

- **ACTION planning should concentrate on the development of moderate-sized projects in multi-county settings.** These types of projects can more efficiently use a manageable number of VISTA Volunteers who can teach and motivate one another.

- **The administrative structure of statewide VISTA Literacy Corps projects should be improved.** Some basic managerial problems and the distance between project locations make it very difficult for VISTA Volunteers to interact effectively. Statewide projects should be reviewed for ways to enhance administration and supervision.

- **VISTA should continue to advise projects of the availability of ACTION-referred VISTA Volunteers.** ACTION-referred Volunteers bring a different perspective to local literacy efforts. They also provide a source of skills unavailable in some local communities.

- **The travel allowance paid to VISTA Volunteers** should be increased **from $ .17 per mile to $ .25 per mile.** Present reimbursements are not enough and do not cover actual costs incurred by VISTA Volunteers, especially in rural project sites.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

- **ACTION should enhance the ability of VISTA Literacy Corps sponsoring organizations to develop self-sustaining projects.** This could take the form of training, technical help, or providing working manuals for planning and fund-raising. ACTION should make a greater effort to review project applications and quarterly reports to determine whether projects are meeting their goals.

- **ACTION should promote greater communication among VISTA Literacy Corps projects** for sharing information on literacy issues. This could be through VISTA in-service training.

- **ACTION should develop a set of needs assessment guidelines for potential project sponsors to improve the match between project design and community needs.** These guidelines would clarify the procedures and information that project could use to conduct a needs assessment within a service area. ACTION should review project applications more closely to assess whether the community information is current. ACTION should also review the extent to which proposed VISTA Literacy Corps projects are consistent with community needs.

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